

DRAMATIC CRITICISM

THEATRE AND STAGE SERIES

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DRAMATIC CRITICISM

BY

S. R. LITTLEWOOD

WITH A FOREWORD BY
SIR BARRY JACKSON



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FOREWORD

WE who work in the theatre as producers and actors alternate between two widely divergent views on the subject of dramatic critics. I can certainly confess to having shared both at different times. One—when they praise our work—is that they are men of taste, erudition, and discernment, splendidly upholding the traditions of that great calling which, as Mr. Littlewood shows us, has in some sense existed since classic times; the other—when they condemn some production on which the manager and the actors have centred all their hopes and to which they have given untold thought, hard work, and expenditure—is that they are ignorant, shallow-pated bigots, incapable of fair judgment or indeed of any judgment at all, frivolous by nature, and further corrupted by nameless agencies of self-interest, jealousy, and intrigue.

The truth must obviously lie between these two extremes, and in Mr. Littlewood we have the ideal guide to showing us where it lies. No one could be better equipped for the task he has set himself in this very interesting and valuable study of critical problems and the critic's duties, merits, and necessary limitations.

No West End first night for a good many years now has been complete without his genial, cheerful presence. Nor has he, as some of his colleagues are perhaps inclined to do, fallen a victim to the delusion that the theatre begins and ends within the four-mile cab radius. He has, we are glad to remember, been on many a voyage of discovery to our theatre in Birmingham, and to the other provincial centres where London's drama is often born; and events like the Stratford on Avon, Malvern, Buxton, and other Festivals are inconceivable without him.

It is not alone his wide knowledge of the drama and stage-history, or a critical sense which he can as well apply to

FOREWORD

films or books, that is the secret of his success and of his popularity, even with those who from time to time bear his strictures. It is a very real passion for what is best in the theatre that shines through his writings as it informs his conversation. One too often suspects dramatic critics of despising or even positively disliking the theatre; to the jaundiced eye of the criticized a triumphant venom seems to intensify the sting of their blame, while an air of lofty and kindly patronage dilutes the perfume of their praise.

Loving the theatre, Mr. Littlewood is intolerant of dull or slipshod work, and rightly. On the other hand, when he approves, his pen glows with appreciation, and one can tell that he is infinitely happier throwing bouquets than hurling bricks. Even in the worst play he is always eager to find some redeeming feature if it is there to be found, and many young beginners, now famous, have been helped and encouraged when S. R. L.'s eye has spotted them in a small part and cited them as a bright flash in a tedious evening.

But Mr. Littlewood would be the first to condemn an over-long prologue to a fascinating play, so it is time to "black out" on myself and ring up the curtain on a book which every one working in the theatre or in critical journalism ought to read and will enjoy reading.

BARRY JACKSON .

DRAMATIC CRITICISM

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

LET us be quite clear as to what we understand by "Dramatic Criticism." I propose, for the time being at any rate, to count everything written about drama as a possible source of dramatic criticism, and every intelligent playgoer as a dramatic critic, to the extent of his influence. This is the first truth that needs to be recognized—that dramatic criticism is by no means confined to the little gathering of theatrical journalists who assemble at first nights in London, Paris, New York, and other centres of population.

During the forty years that I myself have spent as a professional dramatic critic upon London daily newspapers I have been very much impressed with the narrow significance given to our calling as such. We are expected to look at the stage "in blinkers." We have to focus our attention upon immediate things, and to the immediate end of success or failure. Out of the thousands of plays that we see in each decade only a score or so will be worthy of any remembrance at all. The rest could be bunched together just as a social phenomenon of the age—the fact that a number of people sat in rows and laughed or cried at some idle spectacle which had as little actual identity as the unknown scene engaging the figures on a Greek vase. I once asked the late Sir William Gilbert, towards the end of his life, about a play of his with which the old Strand Theatre was opened after reconstruction in the 'seventies. "I remember," he said, "that I wrote the play, but I do not remember what it was called, or who appeared in it, or even what it was about." But the critics who attended that first night of long ago, at

the re-opening of a famous theatre with a new play by a promising young dramatist, had, we may be sure, to treat it as an affair of vital importance.

Critics as Law-makers

I have been conscious, also, of a curiously widespread feeling that critics are, by the nature of their work, to be regarded either as mere parasites of the theatre or as actual enemies within its walls. In their hearts most stage-folk look upon us with either fear or defiance, as defenders of crabbing and obsolete laws, makers of unkind epigrams for our own glorification at the theatre's expense, chartered antagonists to whatever is put before us. Never within my memory have critics as a body been really popular on either side of the curtain, though it has been calculated that they are responsible for at least three-quarters of modern successes in drama and comedy, which would not otherwise have found their public.

Now and then, as I have special reason to know, a generous gesture of mutual goodwill between the theatrical and critical professions does arrive. But such occasions are exceptional. I have often noticed that managerial tributes of gratitude to critics in the theatre are very dubiously received by audiences. The "kind friends in front" reserve their applause for something of which they are more sure.

This is nothing new. It would be difficult to find at any period a sentiment of whole-hearted appreciation of critics. The prevailing belief has generally been that of Byron's diatribe, aimed at Jeffery and the "Scotch Reviewers," but coupling with them the theatre-critics whom Byron blamed for "the degradation of our vaunted stage"—

A man must serve his time to ev'ry trade
Save censure—critics all are ready made . . .
Fear not to lie, 'twill seem a sharper hit;
Shrink not from blasphemy, 'twill pass for wit;
Care not for feeling—pass your proper jest,
And stand a critic, hated yet caressed.

Such a conception of the "compleat" critic may have been more or less true of the Sneers and Dangles of Sheridan's day. It was certainly falsified for the passing generation by men like my old confrères Clement Scott, Joseph Knight, William Archer, A. B. Walkley, and J. T. Grein—not to mention Bernard Shaw in his years as a professional critic. Though each had his antipathies—to which I may refer later—their innate personal love of the theatre was unchallengeable. Yet they never lost their freedom of opinion and expression. In their different ways they did a remarkable creative work. They brought educated and responsible people into the theatre by writing about it with knowledge and sympathetic insight.

Matthew Arnold

"A disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world." Matthew Arnold's famous definition in his *Essays in Criticism* was not lost upon the dramatic critics of his generation. "Do what he will, however"—Arnold observes in the same essay—"the critic will still remain exposed to frequent misunderstandings, and nowhere so much as in this country. For here people are singularly indisposed even to comprehend that without this free, disinterested treatment of things, truth and the highest culture are out of the question. So immersed are they in practical life, so accustomed to take all their notions from this life and its processes, that they are apt to think that truth and culture themselves can be reached by the processes of this life, and that it is an impertinent singularity to think of reaching them in any other."

Not all my old colleagues, perhaps, consistently lived up to this. Clement Scott's view of Ibsen would have stamped him in Matthew Arnold's eyes as a distinct "Philistine"; but even he atoned in other directions.

I must confess to have noticed of late something of a return to the old, uneasy feeling, both towards critics and among them. So far as London is concerned, this may be

partly because the pioneer work of making a public for the theatre has very largely been done. If anything, something of a reaction is in progress. The present need—in England, at any rate—is not so much that of bringing people to the London playhouses, where any lively and approved play is immediately crowded out and runs for years. It is rather that of warning people off a more than usually large proportion of trashy ventures and of bringing comfortable theatres and good plays to the outlying suburbs and drama-starved provinces. A new public is waiting there, ready enough to go to comfortable theatres and good plays, if only they can be supplied. The remedy for this is a matter for managers and playwrights rather than for critics.

National Journals

Also the national journals, with one or two exceptions, no longer deal with the theatre at a length which makes full and balanced criticism possible. One can hardly blame young critics for the short and self-assertive paragraphs which appear in some quarters nowadays under the name of criticism. They have often to be written or telephoned before the play is over in circumstances of ferocious stress. They have to be sufficiently vibrant in character to compete with scandals at home and massacres abroad and other events that go to make up present-day "news." The weekly and monthly periodicals are also suffering from the fact that journalism as a whole is contracting, like the crust of the earth. It does not help dramatic criticism that some circulations are five or six times their former size.

Gone are the days—well within any middle-aged memory—when long and careful criticisms of plays, act by act and character by character, were written at leisure and welcomed and read in the London daily newspapers. The rival claims, too, of the cinema and the radio limit relations still more between the national Press and the flesh-and-blood theatre.

The New Criticism

On the other hand, there is every sign that dramatic criticism at large is by no means either dead or dying. Though the London papers are fewer and less concerned with the theatre, we have more books about the drama than ever, and more specialized theatre magazines. The vast increase in amateur dramatic societies entails new and original work in every phase of theatrical production. It is creating a public eager for criticism of a much more serious and vital kind than the local paper's list of names, with a phrase or two of conventional flattery, which used to serve. Nearly every repertory theatre has now its critical programme and its drama discussions. In the midst of all sorts of disabilities the English theatre is undoubtedly being born again. With it is arriving a new criticism, less concerned with "news" and more in touch with the theatre itself than it used to be.

It is with this in view that I am treating of dramatic criticism on the broad lines that I have suggested. My plan will be, first of all, to outline dramatic history in the light of the contemporary—or most nearly contemporary—records or criticisms of each period, suggesting wherever possible their bearing upon the present-day theatre. I shall try to give each controversial question as clear and simple an exposition as possible, quoting the chief protagonists on either side, so as to provide at any rate a basis for the forming of an opinion. I think it will be found that there is something to be learned from the criticism—as from the theatre's other contributory arts—of every age. I shall try to suggest the origin and course of such external influences as have affected criticism of the theatre—ecclesiastical, political, and social—and the trend of drama in other countries in so far as it has left an impress upon our own. I shall try to trace the growth of dramatic criticism as literature, as news, and as both together. Finally, I shall give some hints from my own experience upon the practice of dramatic criticism as a profession and its relation to journalism as a whole. In these

ways I hope to make the following pages of genuine use and interest not only to intending critics but to all students and lovers of the living drama.

Hard-and-fast Rules

One thing I very especially do not intend to do—and that is to formulate a body of hard-and-fast rules, apart from a few journalistic essentials, either for criticism or for drama in any aspect. More and more, with extended means of expression and communication, the fact is establishing itself that there are no rules. Everything short of criminal procedure is permissible, alike in art and criticism. The wildest indiscretion is unwise only for those who would regret the penalty.

None the less, it is open to anybody—some people have that temperament!—to propound what he or she imagines to be rules, and for other people to discuss them. This has been one of the resources and exercises of the critical mind from time immemorial. However futile, there is a joy in such controversy that adds immensely to criticism's entertainment value, when the battle is brightly and fairly fought. We shall be dealing with several stock themes in the coming chapters. But, as I have already hinted, it is time we bade good-bye to the old idea of the critic as a priggish, oppressive, and unsympathetic imposer of limits and conventions—most of them either obvious or false—upon a body of presumably inspired creators.

"The most noble criticism," wrote Isaac D'Israeli in his *Curiosities of Literature*, "is that in which the critic is not the antagonist so much as the rival of the author." If the word "comrade" could be substituted for "rival," old Isaac's dictum might have a happier and truer significance nowadays. In treating of a form of art which is evanescent, as that of flesh-and-blood drama must be, the critic is something much more than either a judge or a discoverer. He is himself an artist, creating, through his treatment of the play, an expression of his own response to life, which happens

sometimes to reach an immediately wider public, and sometimes to be in itself more permanent, than the performance of any actor on any stage.

Anatole France

According to Anatole France's definition, criticism should tell of "the adventures of a soul among masterpieces." But to the best kind of critics the "masterpiece" is not essential. How often have they immortalized plays, productions, and performances that were very far from being masterpieces! It is to be doubted, for instance, if in actual fact Munden, to whom Charles Lamb devoted an essay which is among the models of creative criticism, was anything more than an efficient character-comedian, chiefly noted for his ability to suggest drunkenness upon the stage. The halo was Lamb's own. Indeed, if Munden had been a really great actor, the kindly irony which was part of the essay's charm would have been lost.

In much the same way, Jules Janin's life of Deburau, one of the gayest and most ingratiating critical biographies ever written, is said to have been done just as a joke. But the renowned French clown—creator of the character of dumb and plaintive Pierrot at the old Théâtre des Funambules—has found it a passport to eternal fame.

I often hear it said, "What is the need of dramatic critics? Why cannot the public be left to choose its plays for itself, just as it chooses its own boots or potatoes?" The answer to this lies in the fact that ultimately it does choose its plays for itself, when it has heard about them from the critics. Also, drama is not a material thing, like boots or potatoes, whose qualities are obvious to anybody without experience or education. One person does not, for instance, take a more enlightened view of boots or potatoes than another—except, perhaps, in expressing a preference for square toes or smooth skins. Moreover, there *are* critics of boots and potatoes. All material commodities are written about extensively—some of them a good deal more so than the theatre. If the

criticisms of them have not lived and become literature to the same extent, is it the fault of the criticisms or of the subject? I myself have not much doubt.

Need of Criticism

The truth seems to me to be that drama needs criticism because, material though it is, its appeal is spiritual. It means one thing to one person and another to another. It needs interpretation, not only by the actor but by a mind schooled to convey its emotional and intellectual messages to a wider circle. Like humanity itself, of which it is a reflex, the art of the theatre has a tendency to drift along the line of least resistance and to become merely base and sensual. As a communal art, it affords the individual no means of expression without the aid of others both in the giving out and the response. In the conspiracy of author, actors, and all concerned in production together with the audience, in the creation and fostering of beautiful and inspiring art, as against the degrading and banal, a sincere critic has still a task to fulfil worthy of high effort and high quality.

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CHAPTER II

ORIGINS OF DRAMA

THE flimsiness of critical theory—in so far as it is theory—is betrayed by a still-continuing haze of doubt and of debate over dramatic origins. Leading scholars of our own day remain as undecided amongst themselves about the drama of three thousand years ago as the critics occasionally are now over a new play. Yet the whole question is very much concerned with the appeal of modern drama. The primitive is still vitally with us. We are constantly recurring to it, and it is a primary consideration of dramatic criticism. So nothing is more important than that we should begin with a clear understanding as to how much in regard to the origins of drama is certain and how much mere guesswork.

As to the meaning of the word *drama* there can be, happily, no disagreement. Its derivation from the Greek *δρᾶν*, to do, marks it once and for all as the art of expression by action. As the verb is to other parts of speech, so is drama in its relation to the other arts. It employs them. It depends upon them to complete its purpose, abstract action being inconceivable. But only when there is something “done,” with a subject and object, can there be drama.

Also there is not—and cannot well be—any difference of opinion as to the natural, human instinct which leads people to a make-believe of “doing.” All are, to that extent, dramatic artists. It is a thing that humanity shares with the animal world. The play of a kitten with a ball and a dog’s retrieving of a stick are both instinctive imitations of the capture of living prey.

Methods of Inquiry

Only up to this point, and, I am sorry to say, no farther, can one claim that there is anything like concurrence of

opinion. The professors who have given lifetimes to a study of the subject are all at odds—a confusing state of affairs to those who look for authoritative guidance. At first sight we find among supposed dramatic origins a hugger-mugger of ancient and modern evidence and ideas. There have always been two main methods of inquiry. One of these has been to inquire into the earliest records of drama. The other has been to inquire into the traditions and customs of still-existing peoples.

The results of research by both methods have been, to my mind, needlessly complicated by worry over the problem of ulterior purposes. Primitive drama was by no means always “art for art’s sake.” But there is no real dividing line between ancient and modern in this. Throughout all ages drama has been created for ulterior purposes. The monetary profit for which a present-day play is generally produced is a practical equivalent to the benefit expected by more primitive peoples from a “magic” rite. So long as there is action, and so long as the immediate purpose is expression, drama may arrive. This is all that we need count for the moment as mattering from an artistic and critical point of view.

Of the different kinds of savage ritual between which authorities have divided their favours, the simplest pretences are hunting-tricks. These are familiar to elementary civilizations all the world over. Animal pretences, curiously like those of a present-day pantomime, are still used by primitive hunters. They must have been universal in primeval times. The Plains Cree Indians, for example, used to have a method of buffalo-catching by which a complete play was gone through for the bewilderment of the buffalo. One Indian, disguised as a buffalo-calf, would get on all fours and begin to bleat pitifully. The other Indians, wrapped in white blankets, pretended to attack him. The buffalos would come up to the succour of the supposed calf, and the hunters would then shoot as many of the herd as were wanted.

Hunting—"Mimes"

These hunting—"mimes"—and there are many others of a similar kind—demanded rehearsal and repetition afterwards for the enlightenment of the tribe. The repetition must have been especially needed in days when language was in its infancy. In these rehearsals and repetitions we find better than anywhere else, I think, the institution of the first audience. Alike in the elder tribesmen's approval—or otherwise—and in the junior tribesmen's handing on of the tradition, we have quite probably the first functioning of dramatic criticism. The fact that in the particular instance I have quoted it was all ostensibly for the practical purpose of killing buffalo makes, as I have endeavoured to show, no difference at all. Always, one may be sure, something more than the necessary labour and enjoyment entered in on the part of both actors and audience. This something was dramatic art.

With these earliest forms of drama may be coupled, in pre-epic days, the realistic recountal of the deeds of war by an actual reconstruction of the scene. Akin to this were the mimetic war dances and varied excitements till recently included in the "corroboree" of Australian aboriginals. Then there were totemistic ceremonies and dances—growing, perhaps, out of the hunting-and-warfare repetitions—and the sacrifice of man and beast, with its strong suggestion of the beginning of tragedy.

"Sympathetic Magic"

I have already mentioned "sympathetic magic"—the bringing about of some real effect by making a pretence of it. There is hardly a kind of drama—ancient or modern—which cannot be traced back, in one way or another, to this fruit of the dramatic instinct. Even the hunting-trick play is associated with it as an effective use of mimetic powers. "Sympathetic magic" was, after all, only a form of primitive science. An Edison or a Marconi studies the causes and effects of external nature, imitates them, and we get the

phonograph and the wireless. So with primitive man. He watched; he imitated; he waited for something to happen. It sometimes did. Hence his belief, and the myths in which this was afterwards enveloped. Upon these blunders of early science drama thrived.

Whether the myth was solar or terrestrial, of fire or of vegetation, drama was the method of its suggestion. It was helped by man's eternal tendency to make gods in his own image. Certain rites had to be performed to ensure success in the hunting-field, or the fertility of flocks among nomad peoples, or a kindly harvest among settled husbandmen. Each of these rites was in its way a dramatic creation. Above all remained that "sympathetic magic" which wove itself around the ritual of the dead and the hope of resurrection. The ceremony might be inspired by the rising and setting of the sun, or the seed sown in the earth and sending up its green shoots with the spring, or any other natural revival. Whichever it had to do with, the drama's debt to "sympathetic magic" was none the less there.

It is hardly surprising that over most of these things scholars are at variance. I myself am convinced that dramatic origins had got themselves inextricably mixed up long before the earliest point at which they can now be studied, and that we cannot expect certainty. The question is not of one people and one age, but of countless peoples, utterly different in their temperaments, conditions, and modes of life, replacing and superimposing themselves upon each other during aeons compared with which the historic past is merely as a shore to a sea.

Primitive Religion

It may be—and probably is—true that the dramatic instinct had something to do from the very first with those gestures towards the unknown which we call primitive "religion." But it is certainly not the whole truth. The known was equally open to dramatic celebration. The savage does not readily distinguish between the "religious"

and the "secular"; nor does the one exclude the other. The gradually evolved symbolism of the worship of sun, stars, rivers, fire, animals, vegetation, and the spirits of all these, was not always on a different plane from the phallic orgy or the jubilation over a successful hunt or foray. To say that the beginnings of drama are to be found exclusively in "religious" observances is a palpable falsity. None the less, the earliest dramas that have mattered to modern civilization, and come within the range of modern criticism, did, most of them, spring from the habit of expressing dramatically a sense of the mysteries of life, death, changing seasons, growth, and reproduction.

Image and Mask

No age of drama has yet recorded itself in which the image—or its more adaptable abridgment, the mask—had not already come into accepted use. One may take it almost as an axiom that these existed before anything in the way of organized wonder or worship. As I have suggested, necessity invents both for very practical purposes. At the same time their manifest usefulness for impersonating unseen but imagined powers would have been very soon discovered. With the image and the mask must have come inevitably the image-maker and the mask-wearer. Age after age, before anything that we know as drama had come into being, the magician and "medicine man" had built up traditions of ritual no less dramatic because some would regard them as "religious."

Much of it was flagrant deception—doubtless with no more sense of wrong-doing behind it than afflicts a present-day player. The Witch of Endor has been thought by some to have been an early illusionist of this kind. An ancient Mexican basalt-mask of Xipe—now in the British Museum—with a wide-opened mouth quite evidently intended to be spoken through, is believed to represent the flayed skin of the victim in which a priest clad himself. In the so-called oracles of Greece, long before the ballad dance had given

tragedy its democratic impetus, priests and priestesses were speaking through the actual mouths of actual images representing spiritual powers. Aeschylus and Sophocles, themselves devout believers, were ready to make the gods in whom they believed speak humanly-devised words through the mouths of humanly-fashioned masks with the voices of paid actors.

Throughout its whole history drama has never passed—and, by its essential character, is never likely to pass—beyond this idea of masked and puppetried humanity, representing whatever it may. Other arts—as, for instance, music—are able to divest themselves completely of all apparent relation to human life. The drama remains standardized to physical humanity, or, less surely, to its semblance and voice on screen and radio. This is so because action and expression cannot otherwise find themselves together. It is all very well to say that a play can be printed. Only to a mind well stored with memories of performance in the theatre can anything like the full dramatic effect be won from the pages of a play-book.

Osiris Passion Play

We can now come, with some sense of what went before it, not exactly to the first dramatic criticism, but to the first personal account of a dramatic performance. It is that of the Passion Play of Osiris performed at and near Abydos over 3000 years before Christ. The account has been discovered as given, in an inscription, by the actual ancient Egyptian producer, I-kher-nefert, who not only organized the pageant but himself took several of the chief parts.

I performed [he tells us] the Great Coming Forth. I followed the god in his footsteps. I made the boat of the god to move. . . . I provided the boat of the Lord of Abydos . . . with a cabin-shrine, and I put on him his splendid apparel and ornaments when he set out to go to the region of Paqer. I directed the god to his tomb in Paqer. I avenged Un-nefer on the day of the Great Battle. I overthrew all

his enemies on the dyke of Netit. I caused him (Osiris) to set out in the boat that bore his Beauty. I made the hearts of the dwellers in the East to expand with joy, and caused gladness to be in the dwellers in Amentat (West) when they saw the Beauty as it landed at Abydos, bringing Osiris, the Lord of Abydos, to his palace.

As Sir Ernest Wallis Budge explains in *Osiris and the Egyptian Resurrection*, the play largely represented the search for the body of Osiris by his sister-wife, Isis, and son, Horus, who avenges his father's death at the hands of Set, the God of Darkness, and restores Osiris to life. The Passion Play lasted three days, the procession moving from place to place in representation of the search for Osiris's body, which had been cut into fourteen pieces. At each place of supposed discovery there was a sham fight—or, rather, an extremely realistic one. The entry of the body into the temple was watched by vast crowds who “uttered piercing shrieks and lamentations, the women beating their breasts.”

I-kher-nefert seems to have been a producer-actor of remarkable vigour and importance; for he “doubled” the part of ferryman with that of Horus. Probably, according to Budge, after the final battle, he sacrificed not only animals, but a certain number of the defeated mimic opponents. For this fate criminals and prisoners of war were specially earmarked.

Herodotus

We know that this Passion Play of Osiris continued for over 3000 years; for Herodotus saw it in the fifth century B.C. He was then a cautious chronicler. In referring to Sais, the modern Sa-i-Hagar, he says—

On this lake it is that the Egyptians represent by night his sufferings whose name I refrain from mentioning. . . . I know, too, the whole course of the proceedings in these ceremonies, but they shall not pass my lips.

On the other hand, his description of a ritual drama at

Paprêmis in honour of "the Egyptian Mars" is vivid enough to give at any rate some idea of the Osiris battles—

When the sun is getting low, a few only of the priests continue occupied about the image of the god, while the greater number, armed with wooden clubs, take their station at the portal of the temple. Opposite to them is drawn up a body of votaries, in number above a thousand, armed, like the others, with clubs. . . . The few priests still in attendance upon the image, place it, together with the shrine containing it, on a four-wheeled car, and begin to drag it along. The others, stationed at the gateway of the temple, oppose its admission. Then the votaries come forward to espouse the quarrel of the god, and set upon the opponents, who are sure to offer resistance. A sharp fight with clubs ensues, in which heads are commonly broken on both sides. Many, I am convinced, die of the wounds they receive.

Such was Egyptian drama in the age of Herodotus and—as I-kher-nefert's testament shows—for at least 3000 years before him. I have thought it worth referring to as the first type of drama which is sufficiently documented for comparative criticism. But it cannot be described as primitive. On the contrary, this mammoth spectacle, organized by a sophisticated priesthood to impress an ignorant multitude, represents something we know only too well. It reveals tendencies of mass entertainment against which intelligent criticism has always had to struggle and is still struggling. Our present drama at its best, with its sincere treatment of social problems, does not seem, by contrast, to be as retrogressive as is sometimes claimed.

Rival Theories

As to the meaning of the affair, it cannot be imagined that either the slaves who tilled the soil and built the pyramids and temples of ancient Egypt, or their owners, were moved to crack each other's skulls by such speculative theories as those put forward in Sir James Frazer's *Adonis*, *Attis*, *Osiris*, and by more exclusive "Egyptologists." Sir

James himself changed his mind. He regarded Osiris at first as purely a symbol of vegetation, but afterwards agreed that he may have been an actual ruler and culture-hero of Egypt. Others have claimed both Osiris and Isis as Syrian introductions. From some points of view there is no doubt that Osiris's death and resurrection had a reference to the setting and the rising of the sun. There are those who believe that as the first digger of canals he came to be an impersonation of the all-providing waters of the Nile.

To the critics of drama, as such, a decision between these far-fetched theories and symbolisms matters as little as it probably did to the club-swingers and spectators of Herodotus's day. The aspect of Osiris that made him a favourite figure in popular drama was quite obviously and solely the human aspect. He was the human god, the god of simple, working, sorrowing, and rejoicing humanity. He was the god of "green pastures" as against the animal-headed deities with which the Egyptian common-folk, who had very much the mentality of the American negro of our times, had been and were still terrified.

To them also Osiris and his resurrection represented a definite individual hope of immortality. This belief was assiduously cultivated by an astute priesthood, who had arranged a ritual of "the opening of the mouth," performed upon the mummy, by which any one who could afford to pay for it could "be an Osiris" and enjoy a future life. The Egyptians were, for the most part, simple-hearted, credulous souls, who hated death. Hence not only the mummies, but the sepulchral furniture and food. So Osiris had a universal appeal just because he had a personal one—a democratic god, as against the unsympathetic Ra of the ruling powers.

Besides its public displays, the Passion Play of Osiris included elaborate secret liturgies of the priests and a "mime" of the actual resurrection, enacted in the tomb itself—the "peace-chamber"—where sat the "Lord of Silence" with hand on mouth. The liturgies themselves,

with their repetitions and extravagances, where true expression was neither needed nor demanded, are now a labour even to read, and entirely lacking in human vitality and revelation.

While these things were happening in Egypt, a theatrical performance of a very different type—more honest, but hardly more ennobling—is recorded on no less trustworthy authority than that of the Bible as having taken place not so very far away. It was at Gaza, that “chief city of the Philistines,” and the occasion was the death of Samson. Dr. H. R. Hall, in the section of the Cambridge Universal History on “The Civilization of the Philistines,” says—

The present writer has observed that the theatre—or, rather, the “theatral area,” as Sir Arthur Evans calls it—which was so marked a feature of the palaces of Cnossus and Phaestus, seems to have been introduced by the Philistines, together with the gladiatorial games that took place in it, to judge from the Biblical account of the exhibition of Samson in the temple at Gaza (Judges, xvi, 27). “Now the house was full of men and women; and all the lords of the Philistines were there; and there were upon the roof about three thousand men and women, that beheld while Samson made sport.” The passage almost gives one a shock when one remembers the Cnossian fresco of the Cretan lords and ladies, with the crowds of men and women mixed in this un-Semitic wise that the Jewish writer emphasizes purposely, represented in summary outline, no doubt, as looking on at the sports of boxing and bull-grappling.

Though different in particulars, the general trend of Philistine preference in theatrical entertainment has a curious echo in just the sort of “show” that baffles the conscientious dramatic critic to-day. We may not exhibit a blinded prisoner of war, but it would be useless to deny that well-known characters have before now been presented on our modern music-hall stage for celebrity’s sake alone, and without Samson’s muscular credentials. One may remember that, in *Samson Agonistes*, Milton anticipated Dr. Hall’s

discovery by referring to the scene of Samson's last exploit as a "spacious theatre." It may be noted, also, that the entire seating capacity of Drury Lane theatre is only 2600—or 400 less than that of the "roof" which Samson brought hurtling down.

Epic Recitation

A much richer life than either of these ancient types of drama affords is to be found in the early forms of epic recitation. The poet, singing his individual inventions for a human audience was a far more fruitful pioneer of art than the formula-bound priest. To some extent the epic, like the classic drama, developed from the tribal ballad dance—how far remains to be proved. The tendency now is to find a kind of conglomeration of dramatic lyrics in almost all epic poetry, from Homer to the Elder Edda. Certainly epic and drama helped from the first to inspire each other.

For instance, very nearly contemporaneously with the Osiris Passion Play, we have in India something that joins epic with dramatic form. This was the Rig-Veda, the Sanskrit book of sacred hymns. Some of these are in actual dialogue—such as one between Indra, the thunder-god, and his wife, Indrani; another between Yama, the God of the Dead, and his sister-wife, Yami; and another telling the story of the celestial nymph, Urvaci, and her earthly spouse, Pururavas. This was afterwards made into a famous drama by Kalidasa. About the Rig-Veda hymns there is a broad humanity, a passionate and direct sincerity of utterance and a delight in natural phenomena which tell of a wholly different spirit from that of Egyptian ritual.

Poet-Priests

The reason is clear when one remembers that, at the time when the Rig-Veda hymns were composed, caste had not yet come into being. There was no hereditary priesthood. They were written by poet-priests, the choice of whom was dependent upon their fitness for this form of expression. No

sooner did caste become rigid, and the service of the gods a monopolized ritual, than we find the inevitable happening. The later Atharva-Veda, in fact, presents exactly what one would have expected. It is a farrago of incantations and magical formulae, for counteracting supposed terrors emanating from deities viewed in earlier days with wonder and joy. So the springs of true human drama that there were in the Rig-Veda dried up. At the same time, there seems to have flourished from the earliest times among the common folk, to whom the study of Sanskrit was forbidden, a popular Prâkrit, or dialect drama. This was in a large measure the real precursor of the great dramatists of long after.

A mythical tradition credits the origin of the Indian theatre to the gods themselves. Indra is represented as having been delegated by the other gods to approach Brahma, the creator, with a prayer. This was to the effect that, although all other delights of the senses had been accorded to mortals, something was lacking. It was pleaded that what was wanted was a dramatic spectacle. Brahma is said to have nodded graciously, and to have fallen into a profound meditation. Out of the divine thought sprang the Natya-Veda—that is, the Veda, the book or lore, of the theatre. This is all very well; but the real source of the Indian drama seems to have been popular recitation, in which the single reciter came, as in the early days of Greece, to be replenished by a second. These dialogues grew so much in general favour that soon Sanskrit was discarded, and dancing and singing were brought in. One finds recorded among the earliest of these popular Prâkrit plays one upon *The Binding of the Titan*, which suggests that Aeschylus in *Prometheus Vinculus* was by no means the earliest dramatist to make the subject his own. The Vedic priesthood did their best to control this popular cult. It survived in spite of them. Some of the Vedic dialogues themselves, as we have them, were probably only highly polished Sanskrit recensions of popular dramas current long before.

Festival Plays

Of the actual old Prâkrit dramas nothing but the tradition remains, together with references in Sanskrit treatises upon dramatic art. Herein we have a curious reversal of the general belief that the playwright is destined to an immortality denied to the critic! Even in the later Sanskrit plays, however, the Prâkrit element still survives in the dialogue of feminine characters, in the low comedy, and in the talk of the royal or divine hero's inevitable jester-companion. Moreover, there has been recently throughout Bengal a revival of Yatras, or melodramas, in connexion with the Krishna cult, which has been enormously popular.

The festival plays in honour of Rama, the kingly hero of the "Ramayana," which have developed into regular operas in Ceylon, suggest that, although no written literature has enshrined them, the old folk-dramas have survived continuously in form, if not in word. But the most admired gems of Indian drama—the Sanskrit plays of Kalidasa and his successors—were still in the far future when we have to bid good-bye to Sanskrit as an early dramatic medium. The fact which we have to remember now for critical purposes is that drama had reached a very high development indeed across the Indus, at a time when that of Greece had hardly emerged from barbarism.

Chinese Drama

Looking elsewhere, both East and West, it is noticeable how little is to be found of real value to modern theatrical tradition before the amazing outburst of the Attic theatre. The Chinese claim a drama dating back to 900 or—according to some scholars—1800 years before Christ. Even that would make it comparatively young by the side of the Osiris Passion Play and the Rig-Veda hymns. No actual record of anything even potentially dramatic can be traced until the reign of the Emperor Ming Huang of the T'ang Dynasty. He established the Pear Garden, a kind of college of singers,

dancers, and, possibly, actors. This was in the first half of the eighth century of our era. He is supposed to have been moved to his enterprise by a visit to the moon, and some performances in the "Palace of Jade" he saw there! It was not really until the rule of the Mongols in the thirteenth century that the Chinese drama began to have what may be called a life of its own. It was about the same time, too, that the Japanese drama, probably under Chinese influence, began to develop in the heroic dramas which came to be known as the Nô. But of this in due time.

Under Five Empires

The most remarkable thing of all is that the five great empires which succeeded each other on and around the plains of Mesopotamia—the Chaldean, the Assyrian, the Babylonian, the Median, and the Persian—should have left behind them practically nothing at all that can help to fill up the gap between the Egyptians and the Greeks. We have memorials of sacrifices, processions, festivities of all kinds, but nothing to compare with the Osiris Passion Play in definite expressiveness. One might, perhaps, understand this in view of the muscular materialism of the Assyrians, and their devotion to the chase and to coarser pleasures. But even in Babylon there is no record or relic of anything which could be described as a theatre.

We do not know exactly to what extent image worship was carried on in the religious observances of the Babylonians, with their mixture of Aryan and Semitic population. There appears to be still some doubt as to the "golden image" which King Nebuchadnezzar set up in the plain of Dura, and before which he commanded "all peoples, nations, and languages" to fall down at the sound of the "cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and all kinds of music." Nothing is left to show whether it was an image of Bel or of himself. Neither have we as yet learned the full extent of Nebuchadnezzar's achievements as a builder. The great temple of Bel at Babylon was undoubtedly much extended

by him, together with public buildings of all kinds in a host of cities. If there had been any theatres in Babylon, he would probably have built at least some of them. But as it is, beyond such pageantry as that in which Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to join, Nebuchadnezzar draws blank as a theatrical architect!

The Book of Job

Under the Persian dominion, however, if not under the Assyrian, the profession of story-telling—closely akin as it was to the Magian crafts of soothsaying and dream-interpretation—must have anticipated the drama to some extent, much as did the early hymns of the Rig-Veda and the Homeric epic. In the Book of Job, for instance, which as a piece of literature remains one of the greatest achievements of the human mind, we have something which seems to exhibit in itself a genuine growth of lay drama. This is so, although one cannot entirely agree with those who believe that the final author intended it for dramatic performance. So far as its present form is concerned the Book of Job is, in all probability, hardly older than the fifth century before Christ. The story itself seems to have been a very old Arabian or Chaldean fable. Upon this must have been grafted by one or more Hebrew writers, very much inspired with the spirit of national restoration from the Captivity, a kind of Platonic dialogue, with the addition of those magnificent and perhaps already traditional nature-poems that are put into the mouth of the Almighty.

It is quite possible that, earlier than this, a comparatively short dialogue or “mime” may have been enacted by way of interlude in the story-telling, with separate story-tellers representing the friends. The story may well have reached at any rate this limit of drama when the author of what we know as the Book of Job seized upon it for his own purposes. But it is an outrage against common sense to imagine that the full present composition of forty-two chapters was ever spoken at one sitting, or that it could be returned to or divided into

parts with anything like dramatic effect. Recent efforts at dramatic adaptation have only confirmed this point of view.

“The Song of Songs”

A far greater possibility of having been directly written for dramatic presentation attaches to that loveliest of idylls, “The Song of Songs, which is Solomon’s.” There appears reason to believe that this, in its present form, was a much later product of Jewish genius even than the final version of the Book of Job. It may have been contemporary with—if not an imitation of—Theocritus himself! The questions are still in dispute—whether it was in fact a drama; if so, who were the persons concerned; what, if any, were the symbolical intentions; and under what conditions it was meant to be sung or acted. Somehow one cannot evade a belief that it is a connected series of dialogues and lyrics, and not, as has been suggested, a mere random collection of hymeneal songs. Here, again, the most acceptable trend of opinion lies with the idea that as an anti-Judean folk-play of Northern Israel “The Song of Songs” was an actual echo from the days of Solomon. Like the Book of Job, it may have been put long after by an individual poet into what we call “literary” form.

Certainly there is no radical improbability to be found in the arrangement by which the Shulamite, the “rose of Sharon,” is represented as being brought from her vineyard unwillingly to the harem of Solomon. It is clear that, under this interpretation, she is addressed by Solomon himself and exhorted in vain by the praise of Solomon on the part of a kind of chorus of “daughters of Jerusalem.” Still persisting in her reluctance, she is quite evidently at last rewarded by the arrival of her “beloved” from the streams of Lebanon, the “mountains of the leopards.” The beauties of “The Song of Songs” as a drama have certainly not as yet had anything like full justice done to them in any kind of theatrical production, though some attempts have been made. One cannot help feeling that performance upon this plan would

be eminently feasible without any violent adaptation. It would understandably repay any lavishness of art—musical or otherwise.

As not having emerged in their completion before the so-called classic drama was already on its way, the Book of Job and “The Song of Songs” should strictly come into our consideration later on. But in some form or other they cannot but have existed during the pre-classical interim. It is one of the ironies of history that the very race which eschewed image-worship in its own religion should have produced those two immortal creations at a time when image-worship itself was elsewhere laboriously and unconsciously bringing ostensible drama into being.

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CHAPTER III

ALTARS OF DIONYSUS

OF drama in all ages one may say that there is, outwardly, no continuous progress. It has proceeded always by sudden harvests, reaped under the stimulus of peculiar conditions. Each of these harvests rushes to its fulfilment in a generation or so. Then the convention apparently stagnates for centuries, or, it may be millenniums. In almost every outburst, too, there has been a sense of getting back to some so-called original. This is generally just a getting-back to the essential and hardly-changing humanity by which the living drama, with its physical presences of actor and audience, must be bound and standardized.

Yet, both during these apparent rushes and recurrences and in the age-long intervals, one may say, with Galileo, "it moves." The great dramatists reveal themselves as the inheritors of vast masses of obscurely created and preserved material. Out of this their genius seizes what will be valuable for the moment—and, possibly, for the future; though that to the dramatist is a consideration for which he must make no concessions. His instrument and his audience are living and immediate. No new or "revived" tradition exactly repeats its predecessor. Whether it be called progress or no, each dramatist and group of dramatists are part of the flow of human life and custom. Even Shakespeare speaks in a language that is no longer common speech; and he must be judged as a modern of moderns as against his nearest classic rival.

These facts may be borne in mind in passing over the 3000 to 4000 years after the time when I-kher-nefert went to Abydos. We must cram into a chapter all that happened between that adventure and the miraculous outcrop of dramatic genius that was concentrated in the Athens of Pericles. But for this, also, how vast and slow was the

preparation ! How many millions of dramatic performances, unrecorded and unrenowned, went to the making of the theatre of Dionysus at its greatest and its then newly divided art-forms of tragedy and comedy !

It would be impossible here—and needless from a critical point of view—to trace every reason why the Athenians, within little more than a single life-time, should have produced drama which remains the foundation of nearly all we modernly know by that name. As we have seen, great “original” drama demands for its forthcoming the free expression of a number of people, physically present, with a united purpose and sympathies. There must at the same time be the stimulus of common achievement, a certain interval of security, and a wealth of familiar but still unstereotyped tradition upon which to draw for a common appeal.

This is, as it happens, an astonishingly rare combination of circumstances. It occurred in the Athens of Pericles. It occurred in the England of Elizabeth and in the France of Louis XIV. At other times and places where memorable dramatic expression might have been expected—as, for instance, after the French Revolution or the winning of American Independence—there has always been something lacking. In the one case the obsession of Napoleon followed too soon. In the other, a scattered people and traditions too recently broken may have had their effect. One must allow, too, for the existence of a peculiar dramatic genius in the Greeks; but why should this have been so singularly a respecter of time, place, and opportunity as to confine itself to one city and one century? Some further explanation seems demanded. It may be that, in drama as in other matters, the hour brings the men !

Religion

As with earlier drama, we must come very carefully to an understanding as to what is really meant when we say that Greek drama sprang from “religious” observances. Undoubtedly it developed from the worship of the gods and

from ritual, possibly with actual human sacrifice, certainly with dancing and song. At the same time, we have to keep before our minds the fact that the present meaning of the word "religion" does not at all tally with the impulses that inspired the celebrations out of which Attic tragedy and comedy arose.

With us the word "religion" inevitably suggests moral repression—indeed, its Latin source implies as much. The "religious" impulses from which Greek tragedy and comedy sprang were, if anything, of an absolutely opposite nature. They were impulses, to begin with, of exuberant imagination and joy of life, of ecstatic "enthusiasm" (dwindled word!), and of gratitude for the fruits of the earth, fertility of flocks, and success in battle. These were, as in the primitive dramas we have already discussed, coupled with an unscientific, but, in its intention, practical method of ensuring a recurrence of benefits, whether by sacrifice or some other imitative ritual. They involved also a belief in survival after death, expressed in the simulation of dead heroes and their doings, and a bewildered but none the less lively attribution of a human character to the natural forces represented by gods.

Drama and Law

The idea of law and its derivation from divine decree goes back, of course, to pre-Homeric times, in the "dooms" of Zeus. But the kind of religious ceremonial from which Greek drama emerged was certainly not "religious" in the sense of the modern church-goer, who expects the ceremony he takes part in to provide an incentive for the amendment of his daily conduct. In point of fact, it was very largely the drama itself, as a lay adjunct to ceremonial rites, which set itself to explore and discuss ethical ideas, upon which the Greek mind always held a more or less open attitude. It was this very fact which gave to the early tragedies much of their vital interest alike to their contemporaries and to us.

One of the chief reasons, accordingly, for the vast influence of Greek drama, is that, for the first time in the history of the world, moral right and wrong were brought to the judgment of a free and representative assembly of citizens. Their "religion" had only a vague answer of "riddling oracles" on such matters. For all the intensity of their perceptions, the Athenian democracy were in actual practice amazingly little under priestly dominance in comparison with other nations of antiquity.

Moreover, it is to be emphasized that Athens in its glory reaped a harvest of art, not only from many ages, but from many lands. Throughout the long era of civilization which had its final expression in Homer, one finds little that is definitely to be set down as drama. But there is much by inference. As an epic poet, Homer himself was not unaptly called the "father of drama."

A Tale of Two Gods

From the ritual point of view, one may still—in spite of much challenge over detail—trace the birth of Attic drama to the invasion of the ceremonial worship of the Dorian sun-god, Apollo, by that of Dionysus, or Bacchus, god of vegetation, and especial patron of the vine. Dionysus was identified by Herodotus with Osiris, and certainly found his way under one name or another into every quarter of the classic world. How he came to Greece is still a vexed question. He was held in peculiar favour by the Ionians, which suggests an oversea introduction. He is remarkably like Osiris in the story, told by Diomedes in the *Iliad*, of King Lycurgus of Thrace, who was supposed to have chased Dionysus and his frenzied Bacchanals into the sea, whereupon the "gods that live at ease were wroth, and Cronos' son made Lycurgus blind." This does not necessarily prove that the Bacchic ritual came through Thrace; but it does suggest that it had developed there spontaneously and against royal authority in the pre-Homeric period.

The contrasted elements in the worship of Apollo and

Dionysus were united by Arion—the dolphin-charming minstrel of the seventh century B.C., and the first great name in Greek drama. Even before that time, the oracle and temple of Apollo had reached the height of their renown at Delphi. Meanwhile the rustic revelries to the honour of the more human and popular Dionysus had spread more and more widely. The two cults flourished together at Corinth. There Arion, who came originally from the island of Lesbos, had settled.

Lyre and Flute

The inner mysteries of Apollo were not for profane eyes, and even his outward ritual was grave and restrained in comparison with the frank rowdyism of the Dionysia. The Apollo ritual was largely composed of "lyric" choruses—that is, strictly speaking, choruses accompanied by the harp or lyre. Upon this Arion was the most celebrated performer of his day. Arriving as a harpist, he proved to be something much more. He was a creative "producer." Despite his professional skill upon the solemn stringed instrument, he had been brought up in his island home with a knowledge of—and temperament for—the wild dances and freedom of the Dionysian rites. Prominent among them was the "dithyramb," or choric song and dance, done to the livelier flute. This Arion introduced at Corinth. He also brought in a chorus of satyrs, dressed in goat-skins, developing a kind of singing ballet, with dramatic elements. These goat-skinned satyrs gave to future Greek tragedy, or "goat-song," at least its name. But it is always to be remembered that they had no connexion whatever with the Latin word "satire," which is akin to "satiety" and means a full dish or "medley."

Another element of the Dionysian celebration was the "comus" or wandering processional dance, from which the word "comedy" was to be derived. The whole thing, starting as a country festival in celebration of the god of wine, was undoubtedly accompanied in its earliest days—and long after—by every sort of extravagance, including actual

drunkenness and other indulgence. The original Dionysia were frankly and precisely "festivals of intemperance." Probably the nearest thing that we know to the "comus" is the old "furry" or "floral" dance, which has been engaged in at Helston, in Cornwall, ever since the time when, in all probability, it really was in honour of the goddess Flora. In the Helston dance, as may still be seen, the whole village sets itself to dance in and out of the houses in a kind of procession, with as much revelry as present-day decorum permits. The original "comus" seems to have been something like this, though, of course, a good deal more abandoned.

The "Comus"

What the original purpose of the "comus" was is still fiercely contested. The object that used to be suggested was to escort to the altar of Dionysus the sacrificial goat, bull, or ram—originally, perhaps, a man—together with fruit and wine. But there are now other views, which I shall discuss later. It is important that in the troop was a personification of Dionysus himself. He was represented by either a statue or a masquerader, made up, with crown of ivy and sometimes little horns jutting from his forehead, to suggest the god of fertility. He carried the thyrsus, or flowering wand, typical of spring. Before him were festal virgins, garlanded, and intoxicated satyrs and bacchantes, their faces smeared with mulberry-juice and winelees. Everywhere the phallus was conspicuous.

With this delirious assemblage marched also a company of ghastlier mummers with white-leaded faces or horrible death-masks, shrouded in grave-clothes. These represented a human tribute to the power which Dionysus, like Osiris, traditionally had in restoring the dead from the world of shades.

Such was the character of the Dionysian revel as Arion brought it to Corinth. How did it come to find itself at Athens two centuries later, honoured not only by a whole literature of tragic and comic masterpieces, but by a huge

structural theatre with elaborate scenic capabilities and an audience every member of which was at once a critic and an enthusiast? Upon this the division of opinion continues to provide academic bookshelves with a new theory every few years. The crux of the problem is to explain how the tragic sublimities of Aeschylus and Sophocles can have sprung from a tipsy rout of satyrs, and how tragedy and comedy became separated from each other.

Rise of Tragedy

The one great classic authority is, of course, Aristotle—and, where history is concerned, he is at least more likely to be right than any one of a remoter age. He contents himself with simple statement.

Both tragedy and comedy [he writes in his *Poetic*] were originally improvisations. Tragedy had its origin with the choir-masters of the dithyramb, but comedy with those of the phallic songs, which even now remain in use in many cities. Tragedy went through many changes, but gradually advanced as improvements suggested themselves, until it came to its proper form and stopped there.

It was Aeschylus who first raised the number of actors from one to two, cut down the chorus and made dialogue the principal thing. Sophocles introduced three actors and stage decorations. Further, the original short fables were enlarged, and the number of episodes increased. It was a long time before tragedy, developed as it was from satyric drama, threw off ridiculous language and acquired dignity.

The metre also changed from the trochaic, appropriate for dancing, to the iambic, which is best for conversation.

Though every word that Aristotle writes on questions of fact is vital, his omissions leave almost unlimited scope for conjecture. He makes no mention of any name before Aeschylus, or of any sacrificial or other rite that would have excused the arrival of a seriously dramatic element into the dance of satyrs. He gives no suggestion as to what the ritual round the altar of Dionysus was before the enactment of a "fable" in dramatic form. We are left to guess whence this last sprang, whatever its original themes. Did the dithyramb,

like our ballads and sea-shanties, entail a solo-verse and choric refrain, or question and answer on the part of sections of the chorus—as in the singing games familiar still to children and savages? Or were there litanies, with a leader and the rest alternating lines, or all of these together? Not least, nothing in Aristotle's account suggests how or why the dramatic development of the Dionysia should have happened at Athens to so much greater an extent than in the other Greek cities, where Dionysus was also popular.

Sir William Ridgeway

Among recent theories one which has met with large acceptance, and cannot be lightly dismissed, is that propounded by Sir William Ridgeway in his *Origin of Tragedy* (1910). It is that the element of tragedy was itself older than the introduction of the Dionysia into Greece. According to Sir William, it grew out of the custom whereby incidents in the lives of local heroes were enacted at their tombs. He also suggests that the cult of Dionysus at Athens was "superimposed" upon these hero-celebrations, just as it was at Corinth upon the cult of Apollo.

A sidelight upon such a possibility is thrown by Herodotus's account of the methods of Cleisthenes, tyrant of Sicyon, a city on the Corinthian gulf, of weaning the Sicyonians from their devotion to the memory of Adrastus, an Argive hero, to whom there was a shrine in the market place of the town.

It had been their wont [says Herodotus] to honour Adrastus with tragic choruses, which they assigned to him rather than to Dionysus. Cleisthenes now gave the choruses to Dionysus.

Nietzsche

This early incursion of politics into drama has a peculiar interest to our time because it was upon his belief in the worship of Dionysus as an expression of the "unmoral life-force" that Nietzsche was to build up his doctrine of ruthless

efficiency and the evolution of the "superman." The strange effect of this phase of Greek humanism, as seen through Prussian spectacles, was to help to inspire the Great War on the one hand and on the other to give the title to Bernard Shaw's delightful discussion-comedy—though Shaw, not very convincingly, renounces his debt in the preface to *Major Barbara*. Nietzsche's theories were also to have a very strong influence upon the modern stage in all sorts of ways, both ethical and technical, to some of which I may refer later, from Strindberg to present-day "expressionistic" drama. The affair is, as we have seen, at once complicated and simple—complicated to the student of origins; simple to Cleisthenes and his modern successors.

But to return to Sir William Ridgeway—

There never was a period [he writes] either at Corinth, Sicyon, or Athens, or anywhere else in Greece, when dithyrambs and tragedies were restricted to the celebration of the exploits and sufferings of Dionysus. . . . On the contrary from the first inception of anything like formal dithyrambs and tragedies, these were employed, like the ruder forms out of which they sprang, to honour the illustrious dead.

This theory remains a tempting solution of all sorts of difficulties, especially in view of the intense veneration of their local worthies exhibited by the Greek cities. It can hardly, however, be an exclusive source of tragedy. Quite apart from Aristotle's definite pronouncement, the more general rite would naturally have included the less. We find, for instance, in our own churches that the entire edifice is devoted to the service of one God. At the same time we find that it bears the name of a human saint to whom it is dedicated, and to whose memory pageant-plays have been, and still are, sometimes performed. These do not invalidate the church's general purpose.

Festivals

The probability is that in early Greece all sorts of celebrations coincided with each great festival. In much the

same way throughout medieval times, both in Europe and in this country, church-festivals were made use of for all kinds of solemn ceremonies side by side with reckless jollities. A suggestion of both of these still survives in our Christmas and Easter festivals and holidays. Out of these grew, to some extent, our own native drama. The Greek festivals, in like manner, were a "gathering of the clans" for all sorts of purposes, grave and gay. Perhaps we should be right in not imagining too elaborate a development of actual drama before Aeschylus's time. Swiftly as both tragedy and comedy perfected themselves, there must have been still—on the very eve of their highest achievements—much that we should call barbaric.

Origin of Comedy

The Ridgeway "hero-worship" theory has a distinct rival, it must be confessed, in the idea suggested by Mr. F. M. Cornford, in his *Origin of Attic Comedy* (1914). Mr. Cornford remains faithful to Dionysus, viewing him not merely as the gross excuse for the licentious orgies pictured by Sir William Ridgeway, but as an impersonation of the Year-spirit—whose death in the autumn, resurrection in spring, and marriage in summer, made possible the inclusion of tragedy and comedy in one celebration. The "comus" was the bridal procession, ending in the marriage feast. He writes—

Not only did our supposed ritual-drama provide tragedy with its essential concepts and comedy with its opportunities for character-study. It is also true that the central incidents could be given a sad or happy turn as emphasis was thrown on the conflict and death of the hero, or on the joyful resurrection and revenge that followed. This difference of emphasis was already present at the religious stage among the various local forms of the ritual. It must not be forgotten that though for us the word *tragic* has come to suggest an atmosphere of prevailing sadness, the happy ending was normal in the trilogies of Aeschylus, and in Aristotle's time it was still debatable whether a tragedy should not end happily.

Ancient and Modern

In the chapter he contributed to Miss Jane Harrison's *Themis* (1912), Professor Gilbert Murray had already summed up things more or less judicially, anticipating Mr. Cornford without altogether forsaking Sir William Ridgeway—

Dionysus [he suggests] represents the cyclic death and re-birth of the world, including the re-birth of the tribe by the return of the heroes and dead ancestors. . . . I think it can be shown that every extant tragedy contains somewhere towards the end the celebration of a taboo tomb. . . . I wish to suggest, however, that while the content has strayed far from Dionysus, the forms of tragedy retain clear traces of the death and re-birth of the Year-spirit.

Here, as with the symbolic Osiris, one cannot help doubting whether the country-folk, among whom the cult of Dionysus first spread, would have cared sufficiently about these far-fetched similitudes to make them go through all the journeyings and other discomforts necessary to joining in a Dionysian festival. After all, the unscholastic playgoer even now does not go to a pantomime because *The Sleeping Beauty* may be based on a solar myth, or because *Jack and the Beanstalk* can be traced to a Norse saga, or because the Demon King and Fairy Queen have elements of Zoroastrian dualism. He goes because it is humanly attractive, because it brings imagination home to his business and bosom and makes him laugh or cry, and because it is a pleasant social institution, with refreshments in the intervals, and everybody else will be there. It is difficult to avoid a suspicion that, apart from the fulfilment of a religious duty, the average man and woman in the Greece of the sixth century B.C. went to a Dionysian festival for reasons not altogether remote from these.

Rhapsodists

It is also to be remembered that, as well as the worship of Dionysus and possible homage to the great ones gone, there was a third element. This, as in India, must have entered

into the pre-dramatic scheme of things at a very early stage. It was the introduction of the reciter, or epic "rhapsodist," to occupy the intervals between dances and choruses. To these reciters we owe the preservation of the Homeric poems—and others. Through them, as well as through the fact that the stories of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were to form so large a part of the earliest Greek dramatic material, Homer's fatherhood of tragedy was doubly true. Probably the reciter appeared at the Dionysian festival without at first being intimately connected with ritual. Arion himself is recorded to have used a reciter to intersperse his dithyrambic songs and dances.

How popular and influential these "rhapsodists" became is shown in the action taken in regard to them by Cleisthenes, tyrant of Sicyon, the astute propagandist already mentioned, who must have flourished less than a century before the birth of Aeschylus. He was not content with enforcing the worship of Dionysus in place of the local Argive hero.

This king [Herodotus relates] when he was at war with Argos, put an end to the contests of the rhapsodists at Sicyon, because in the Homeric poems Argos and the Argives were so constantly the theme of song.

Thespis

As to the development of recital into drama, I find myself especially interested in the views of one of the most recent theorists upon the matter—Mr. A. W. Pickard-Cambridge. In *Dithyramb, Tragedy and Comedy* (1927), he suggests the arrival of other dramas

which, however crude and grotesque they may have once been, contained from the first elements of solemnity. . . . Perhaps in the Attic village of Icaria, Thespis created an actor's part, and brought his plays to Athens, just when the Dionysian festival was being reorganized and extended. On to this festival his drama—which may originally have been performed in autumn—was grafted. This village-drama met and mingled in Athens with the lyrics invented by Arion, and so tragedy

became elevated into a supremely noble form of literature. . . . By a singularly fortunate coincidence the early days of tragedy fell in the time when the mass of legends, whether already in epic form or in process of being so composed, was being collected and consolidated.

Author, Actor, Producer

There is something peculiarly refreshing, after the maze of mystical controversy, in coming across our four-square, if hackneyed, old friend, Thespis. Aristotle ignores him—at any rate in the *Poetic*—but his career is more convincing than that of many more authenticated pioneers of art. In everything about Thespis there is a delightful touch of probability. To begin with, he was a professional touring-manager. Although he is credited with having been a writer and actor as well as producer of tragedies, and a dancer into the bargain, he made no secret as to his real purpose in the matter. He and his rustic troupe had to please because they had to live. He is supposed to have been “discovered,” as we should now say, by Peisistratus, that remarkably enlightened “tyrant,” who seized on the opportunity of a new and vigorous and popular adventure. One cannot help commending the wisdom of Peisistratus, not only in seeing that drama was an irresistible form of propaganda for his rule in Athens, but in giving Thespis a free hand to put the Dionysian festival into proper theatrical trim.

It says much also for the abilities of Thespis himself that, although he must have been an old man at the time, he won the first prize at the Great Dionysia (535 B.C.) when Peisistratus instituted the first dramatic contest. Thespis, it appears, was not the first manager to introduce a soloist who should enter into dialogue with the chorus. As we have seen, Arion himself did something of this kind. But Thespis seems to have been undoubtedly the first to introduce an actor in costume and make-up representing a character. Horace's tale of Thespis's cart has caused needless taunts. One finds it hard to imagine why this very natural means of

transport should be considered an indignity, or in what other vehicle a theatrical company could have carried their belongings from place to place twenty-four centuries ago.

Solon

The story told by Plutarch of Thespis's relations with Solon, the law-giver, is too significant not to be recalled here, however familiar it may be to some—

Solon, who was naturally fond of listening and learning, and who, to a still greater degree in his old age, indulged himself with leisure and amusement, and even with convivial drinking-parties and music, went to see Thespis, who was himself acting, as was the custom in old times. When the play was over, Solon asked him if he were not ashamed to utter and act such lies in the presence of so great a company.

On Thespis saying that there was no harm in speaking and acting thus for sport, Solon smote the ground vehemently with his staff and said, "If we go on praising and honouring this kind of sport we shall soon find it at work in the serious affairs of life."

This anecdote may claim, indirectly, almost a historical value. Had drama existed for any length of time before that interview, the wisest of Greeks—and most experienced in recreation—would hardly have indulged in so very elementary and external a piece of criticism!

Happily, all that we have been told—one can hardly say all that we know—is to the credit of Thespis. With him drama begins to take definite form. The table upon which he took his stand as manager, author, actor, and producer, to address the leader of the chorus was not, possibly, the first table used in ritual displays. It was, none the less, the first stage. From choric hymn to actual dialogue the development was natural and may well have been speedy. He cannot have been—as is sometimes claimed—the inventor of masks. They had been in use from time immemorial. But he was at least the inventor of the use of them for the expression of admittedly fictional character by an actor. He had,

it is said, three kinds—one of white lead, one of purslane, and one of painted linen—very different from the solid affairs that were to follow.

Peisistratus

Not only the form of art but the organization of the theatre at Athens seems to have taken shape almost immediately. Perhaps this was largely due to Peisistratus himself. He was just the right man to see the importance both of the Dionysia as a popular festival and of the drama as a means of giving it new inspiration. He had a great belief in display, as witness his return to Athens with a giantess in shining armour to represent the goddess Athena. Also Peisistratus's love of the Homeric poems—it was he who decreed their collection in the present form—gave to the new art of drama a direction which Mr. Pickard-Cambridge has very shrewdly pointed out. At the same time, the need Peisistratus recognized for ingratiating himself with the common people must have helped to foster the genuinely democratic spirit that enfranchised it from priestcraft and lifeless ritual. Of course, the architectural dignities of the great theatre of Dionysus were not at that time even begun upon. Thespis and his immediate successors are believed to have played in the market-place, a portion of which continued for a long while to be called "the orchestra."

Elizabethan Comparison

The amazingly quick growth of Attic drama to the height of its achievement may be gauged from the fact that Aeschylus was born in 525 B.C., only a decade after Thespis's winning of the first prize at the great Dionysia. But we have to remember that the Elizabethan drama grew almost as rapidly from performances not much less crude than that of Bottom and his associates, to tragedies, comedies, and fantasies still supreme in their appeal. An important reason at Athens was, as I have suggested, the discovery of a goldmine of dramatic material in the Homeric poems, themselves

the accumulation of centuries. Just in the same way "the new learning," and the pouring out of chronicles and classics and all the unmilled harvest of the Middle Ages through the printing-press, were to prove an El Dorado to the Elizabethans.

On the whole the theatre of Athens owed more to political events than did that of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. The Elizabethan and Jacobean drama did undoubtedly benefit by the royal patronage of Elizabeth and James, much as Thespis may have done by the theatrical tastes of Peisistratus. But in England the establishment of Cromwell's practical dictatorship, so falsely called the Commonwealth, meant the complete suppression of the theatre—an experience from which our drama at its best is only now struggling to recover. In Athens the establishment of the democracy by Cleisthenes—grandson of our old Sicyonian friend—brought with it an outburst of freedom, together with a public that looked upon encouragement and control of the theatre as one of the first duties of citizenship. Then came the still stronger stimulus of the united and triumphant struggle against the Persian might—comparable in some ways with the defeat of the Armada, but a much more lasting and fruitful victory.

State Control

One may note that control of the theatre by the State has proved in all modern dictator-ridden countries disastrous and stifling. The drama has practically ceased to have any life of its own at the moment in Germany and Italy, and is one-sided in Russia. In a true democracy, on the other hand, it should be an ideal form of theatrical organization—a matter well worth better consideration than it has yet received in England. In America the Federal Theatre is showing the way—but of this hereafter.

We know that in Athens the fact that the State itself "presented" the performances gave enormous zest to the competitions between dramatists and between the "choregi,"

or chorus masters, who had to provide and train and pay the chorus entirely out of their own pockets. Certainly it reveals a sense of citizenship almost unbelievable nowadays that no further reward than, in earliest times, a goat, and afterwards a crown of ivy, with an official allowance for a single performance which hardly cleared personal expenses, stimulated poets to creations that were to prove immortal. As for the chorus-masters, they lavished upon their labour of love not only arduous effort but an outlay so ruinous that only the richest men could undertake the office.

At first, there appears to be no doubt, the author was himself the chief "producer" and chief actor—when he was not the only one. He had to teach the chorus their lyrics by word of mouth. It was for these duties, apparently, rather than for the play itself, that he received his fee. Only on rare occasions—as with some of Aeschylus's plays after his death—do there appear to have been any revivals until the fourth century at the Great Dionysia, though there were repetitions elsewhere, at which Dionysus would "waive his rights." Aeschylus, like Thespis, figured as actor as well as author. Sophocles acted both masculine and feminine parts—including that of Nausicaä—in his early days, but gave it up later on account of a bad voice. Not only financially does the modern playwright, who looks forward to a fortune from a successful play, fare better than his Greek forerunner. He does not have to risk a two-to-one chance of being defeated by a rival competitor.

To Please the Public

The Greek tragedian had also, in some measure, to burlesque his own work, or extend it into a lighter mood, in the satyr-play which came after the tragedy, like ballet after opera.

He who in tragic verse contended for the prize of a common goat [wrote Horace in his *Art of Poetry* long after] presently introduced on the stage the half-naked forms of the

wild Satyrs. He did not lower the dignity of the Muse, and yet he ventured on rough jokes; for he felt that the allurements and pleasures of novelty would alone keep in their seats spectators who had just assisted at the sacrifice, well-drunken, lawless in spirit.

It is true that the comparative glory was very much greater in the Athens of the fifth century than it would be to-day. Only twice a year were plays performed in Athens itself—at the Great Dionysia in the spring and at the smaller Lenaea—the wine-pressing festival—in January. For the Great Dionysia, when wind and wave were favourable, people trooped to Athens not only from all over Attica but from overseas. The successful poet and successful “choregus” were publicly proclaimed and crowned with garlands of ivy before an audience as large as the entire number of Athenian citizens. The theatre ultimately held some 20,000. They also had their names inscribed upon tablets for ever—though the “choregus” had to pay even for the setting up of the tripod awarded him.

With the playgoing of the entire year crowded into a few days, the sense of an at once national and religious competitive festival was joined to pride in a newly-created art, developing point by point with the national self-realization which it expressed. There is, after all, not so much to be wondered at in the fierce enthusiasm which prevailed in that great open-air amphitheatre. One can also admire the patience with which the Athenian public would sit from early morning till night in the unguarded rays of a burning sun to support or oppose the judgment of a popularly elected jury upon what should be “the play of the year”!

Dionysian Scene

It was, to be sure, a “religious” ceremony—the priest of Dionysus was a member of the audience. But the word “religious” is not Greek. It conveys to us, as I have already noted, a sense of repression which was certainly not there. At no point could either the performance or its reception

have been merely formal or dull. If one were to blend the theatrical keenness of a modern "first-night" with the ritualistic beauty of a cathedral service, the sentiment of a "tattoo," and the open-air rough-and-tumble multitude and excitement of a Test Match, one would probably get something like the spirit of the scene in the Dionysian auditorium at Athens in the middle of that wonderful fifth century B.C.

The professional actor, when he did arrive, fully earned the payment made to him. Not only did he have to play several parts, but he needed to be an extremely skilled expert in voice-production to make himself heard through a mask—with or without a megaphone-mouth—by those open-air crowds. The sometimes complete inaudibility of our own pageant-actors, in days before the amplifier, may be significantly recalled. Also it must have been difficult to wear the thick-soled "cothurnus" with dignity. The Greek drama had, too, a dependence upon music, as well as dancing, which gave it something of the quality of grand opera—a quality to which it reverted strongly in Euripides's later days.

The First Theatre

But this is to anticipate matters. As yet we had only got as far as Thespis himself, as his own actor, helping out the chorus in the market-place. There is no stage up to the present but the sacrificial table upon which the "actor" may or may not have been mounted. For the change of masks, even in the most primitive circumstances, he must have needed something in the nature of a tent or screen. Out of this was to grow at last a stately line of stage-buildings—a subject still of constant archaeological controversy and discovery. The first move from the market-place seems to have been to a small wooden theatre—not unlike Shakespeare's own Globe—of which traces are thought to have been discovered. A larger wooden structure which followed this is known to have collapsed in 499. Thereupon was begun the great permanent stone theatre—not finished till

120 years afterwards—the ruins of which still survive on the south-eastern slope of the Acropolis.

Between Thespis and Aeschylus much more happened than is usually guessed by those who have not gone into the matter. That some sort of drama had already begun to develop is shown in the arrival, as we have seen, of the “conversational” iambic metre, as against the trochaic, or “running” rhythm. Already, too, before Aeschylus had written his first play, the idea of each poet competing with a trilogy of three connected tragedies had been tried. Aeschylus extended and systematized it. His elder contemporary, Pratinas, is credited with the invention of a “satyric” drama which was added to each group, and written by the same dramatist. Probably, however, Pratinas was merely reviving the oldest form of tragedy itself. The “satyric” drama—of which Euripides’s *Cyclops* is the only one that has come down to us—was a light play with a rural scene and a chorus of satyrs, but it dealt with the same heroic subjects and characters as the tragedies. Although intentionally amusing, it was more what we should call an extravaganza than a comedy. Some suggest that the “satyric” drama was a remnant of the original and exclusively Dionysian festival. They hold that the tragedy proper represented the other elements, which had gradually ousted it—just as in pantomime the fairy-tale “introduction” ousted the harlequinade.

Aeschylus’s Rival

Anyhow, the three tragedies and a “satyric” drama had become the necessary tribute of each poet who competed at the turn of the sixth and fifth centuries B.C. Pratinas competed with Aeschylus himself in 500 B.C., and Pratinas’s son was second to the greater poet in the competition of thirty-two years afterwards. Another intermediary between Thespis and Aeschylus, and, apparently, a far more important dramatist than Pratinas, was Phrynichus. He was distinguished for having turned from myth to remembered history for his subjects. In *The Taking of Miletus* he is said

to have so vividly impressed his audience with the misfortunes of their neighbours that a fine was inflicted upon him. Afterwards Phrynichus had the satisfaction of being able, like Aeschylus, to write a play of victory in *The Phoenician Women*. It is supposed that with this he won the tragic prize in 476 B.C., when Themistocles was his choregus. Phrynichus, like Thespis, was himself a "dancer" and is credited with having invented a number of new dances. It is he also who is supposed to have introduced female masks. Even with Phrynichus, and still more with his earlier contemporaries, tragedy remained almost completely lyrical. The subjects were either narratives or expressions of simple emotion, with little in the way of what we should call dramatic conflict, and the construction was of a very straightforward and artless order.

Enter Aeschylus

Such was the point to which Attic drama had come when Aeschylus first competed for the tragic prize in 499 B.C. at the age of twenty-five. The fact that he was born at Eleusis suggests that the secret mysteries in honour of Demeter may well have given a religious cast to his mind, whether or no he was guilty (as he was afterwards charged with being) of having revealed them. It was nine years after his first appearance as a dramatist that he fought with his two brothers at the battle of Marathon—an event that coloured all his life and art. It was to be recalled thirty-six years afterwards in his epitaph, wherein no mention whatever is made of his plays. He is referred to in it only as one of whose prowess "the long-haired Mede can tell who fell at Marathon." Ten years after Marathon he was to fight in the sea victory of Salamis, and, possibly, later at Plataea, though this is not certain. In between he gained for the first time the prize of tragedy (484 B.C.). Altogether he wrote seventy plays, and gained the first prize thirteen times. Of the seventy, only seven are extant. The supreme trilogy of the *Oresteia*—*Agamemnon*, *The Libation-Bearers*, and

The Furies—was written only two years before Aeschylus left for the court of Hiero in Sicily, where he died.

“The Suppliants”

The earliest of his surviving plays is supposed to have been *The Suppliants*. From a modern point of view, it contains practically no drama whatever—a drawback heightened by the fact that its companion plays are lost. It was probably the first of a trilogy, and treats of the very ancient legend, probably told in a lost epic, of how Danaus and his fifty daughters fled from his twin-brother, the Libyan usurper, Aegyptus, and his fifty sons. The sons were intent upon enforced marriage with the daughters of Danaus. The play shows how Danaus and his daughters arrive as “suppliants” at Argos. They are received with respect, and ask, not in vain, the aid of the King of Argos and his people. An Egyptian herald arrives and demands the return of the Danaides, but the Argives have already voted their protection.

The most dramatic event of the story was, of course, reserved for the central play of the trilogy; for afterwards Danaus—a sorry return for his hospitable treatment!—usurped the throne. Then, on the ultimate marriage of his daughters with the Egyptian bridegrooms, he commanded them to slaughter their husbands on the wedding night. They all obeyed, with one exception—Hypermnestra. She, braving the reputation of cowardice, spared Lynceus, who succeeded Danaus as King of Argos, and was probably a chief character in the last play of the trilogy. In the third drama the trial of Hypermnestra was probably the theme. A fragment is still preserved in which the goddess Aphrodite appears in person to defend her votary.

Civic Idealism

In spite of the absence of dramatic movement in *The Suppliants*, there is something peculiarly beautiful about the

whole conception. The high civic idealism it instils, and pride in the courteous treatment of strangers—an elemental piece of national ethics which has not been too prevalent even in modern times—are coupled with a characteristically reverent treatment of Zeus, not as a merely implacable power furthering his own desires, but as a supreme father with whose existence justice and duty are bound up. One sees in him a deification not only of unthinking nature, but of an idealized human conscience linked with it and expressing itself through Fate.

As yet, far the larger proportion of all plays was choric—indeed, *The Suppliants* has been not inaptly compared with the Psalms of Exile. It must have been a singularly picturesque spectacle, with the thymele, or platform which was to be ultimately converted into a definite stage, graced with statues of Apollo, Artemis, Hermes, and other gods, while the fifty daughters of Danaus trooped up from a supposed seashore to the supposed gates of Argos—all in Egyptian costume, and bearing in their hands boughs wreathed in wool, the traditional emblem of suppliants.

“The Persians”

It was, however, with *The Persians*, part of the trilogy with which Aeschylus gained the prize in 472, that his true greatness bursts upon us. It was not by any means the first play that had been written on the tremendous conflict and amazing victory of Greece against the vast forces not of Persia alone but of practically all Asia, that had ended at the battle of Plataea just seven years before. Phrynichus, as I have mentioned, had already treated the defeat of the Persians in *The Phoenician Women*, and had suffered through reminding an Athenian audience of recent disaster in *The Taking of Miletus*. But nothing survives of Phrynichus's play except the charge against Aeschylus of having improved upon it.

Nothing in our modern world—not even the Great War, nor the Napoleonic struggle—quite corresponds to the theme

with which Aeschylus had to deal. It is important to remember that the victory of the Greeks was no piece of sudden good luck, as the defeat of the Armada to so great an extent was. Between the heroism of Marathon and the final glory of Plataea, with Salamis between them, eleven years had passed. During them the Greeks had withstood three waves of invasion in one of which Athens itself had been occupied and Attica laid waste.

A "Marathon Man"

Behind all was an antagonism ancient as the gods of east and west. Greece had liberated Europe from the certainty of an alien bondage compared with which modern conquest is but a mild political convenience. Aeschylus had fought in two campaigns—perhaps in three. He was a veteran of veterans—one of the "Marathon men," as Aristophanes was to call them. The decade of passionately patriotic effort had got into his blood in a way that made his already mentioned epitaph not by any means a pose. His heart had been purged by the repeated facing of death for his country against overwhelming odds. His imagination had been inspired and enriched by the vastness and splendour of the world-pageant afforded by the fifty nations gathered under Xerxes.

"Long-haired Mede" and luxurious Lydian, elephants and four-horsed chariots, dazzled the memories, as they had once dazzled the eyes, of the old Athenian soldiers. But an Asian was still a "barbarian." Behind all was a consciousness that what was in many material ways the simpler civilization of Greece was in reality a higher one. It was based on higher and purer ideals, because it was based on a belief in gods representing the conscience of humanity, and on brotherhood and on justice. Aeschylus's ideal of democracy was to be very largely forfeited during his own lifetime by his own countrymen. He lived to be accounted very much of an aristocrat and to die in voluntary exile.

First Historical Drama

Alike technically and in the personal message conveyed, *The Persians* remains one of the greatest as it was the first of surviving historical dramas. Like *The Suppliants*, it was one of a trilogy of which both the other plays are lost. It was evidently the middle one. With it Aeschylus shows a dramatic skill very much in advance of *The Suppliants*. Where *The Suppliants* is lyric, *The Persians* is epic. Its description of the battle of Salamis is Homeric in spirit, though the vision was fresh in the memory alike of the author and of a good many of his audience. All the names and geographical allusions of which Aeschylean drama is full come out with the ring of reality. As yet the lyric and epic elements monopolized almost the whole play. They had not fused into drama as an entirely separate creation. None the less, Aeschylus was feeling his way to something nearer his later tragedies than *The Suppliants* represented. There are invention, revelation, suspense, contrived with masterly simplicity, but still contrived.

Across the Aegean

He had borrowed from Phrynichus the idea of setting his scene on the other side of the Aegean rather than in Greece itself, so that full force could be won from the narrative. He transports us straight to the palace of Xerxes at Susa, where Atossa, mother of Xerxes and widow of Darius, with a chorus of Persian Elders, awaits her son's victorious return by the tomb of her husband. By this simple means Aeschylus is able to introduce with the opening chorus his immortal description of the Persian host, lit with the glowing pride of the Persians themselves. By this means, too, he is able to bring out, as he could have done in no other way, the contrasted arrival of the news of disaster, thunderbolt upon thunderbolt. Atossa herself, with her visions and her voluntary forfeiture of queenly splendour, has a personality as well as a dignity of her own. The ghost of Darius pointing his

moral against the overweening arrogance of man, confirming ancient prophecy and preaching faith in the divine justice of Zeus, composes the emotional storm with an atmosphere of austere reverence.

Full-fledged Drama

We have now come to the time when Attic drama, as such, has been brought into something like full-fledged being. Just as seven plays are all that remain out of the seventy that Aeschylus wrote before he died in his seventieth year, so we have seven also of Sophocles, who was thirty years younger. They represent over a hundred that he wrote in his ninety years of life. Of Euripides, who was fifteen years younger than Sophocles, we have eighteen plays out of eighty, and of Aristophanes's comedies eleven out of fifty-four.

With these forty-three plays—all produced, among many others, within a hundred years—the four great Attic dramatists supplied dramatic criticism with its first and, one might almost say, last theme. Criticism of them began with the *Poetic* of Aristotle, who was four years old at the death of Euripides. It is by no means done yet. The London success of *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1937)—Eugene O'Neill's transfer of the Orestes story to American life during the Civil War—turned many thoughts to the modern spirit in Greek drama. We shall see in the next chapter what some of the critics of the intervening centuries have to say.

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CHAPTER IV

MODERN CRITICISM AND GREEK DRAMA

NO better instance of the change that has come over the critical view of classic Greek drama could be found than in relation to Aeschylus. It is natural enough that the unquestionable genius and high imaginative power of the author of the *Oresteia* and the *Prometheus* should have forced every adjective applied to him throughout all these centuries into the superlative. The result is that an image of his greatness is brought before the ordinary man and woman—the person by whom all criticism as well as all drama must ultimately be judged—which becomes merely repellent and inhuman where it is not meaningless and dead.

Schlegel

Here, for instance, is Schlegel's summary, expressed in somewhat strained metaphors, but successful at least in suggesting that the dramatist is to be looked upon as something altogether superhuman and apart from simple human intercourse—

Aeschylus is to be regarded as the creator of tragedy: in full panoply she sprang from his head as did Pallas from the head of Jupiter. He clad her with dignity and gave her a befitting stage. . . . No softer emotion, but terror predominates with him; he holds up a Medusa-head before the petrified spectators. His management of Destiny is extremely harsh: she hovers over the heads of mortals in all her gloomy majesty. The cothurnus of Aeschylus treads, one might say, with the ponderousness of iron: forms sheerly gigantic stalk in upon it. To depict mere human beings seems almost to cost him an effort of self denial: gods he continually introduces, especially Titans, those elder Divinities, shadowing forth the gloomy powers of primeval Nature, and thrust down, long ago, into Tartarus, beneath a world at length reduced to more serene order. To match the dimensions of his personages

he would fain exaggerate the very language they speak into a gigantic vastness. Hence his rugged compounds, his overloading epithets, and in the lyric parts the many involved constructions and great consequent obscurity.

Valid Humanity

Though this is quite obviously meant to impress, its general effect is simply to project before us a kind of Frankenstein's monster stalking through the Alps. To see Aeschylus represented on any kind of stage with some approach to fidelity, or to read him undeterred by these critical thunderclouds, is to realize that Schlegel's view is much exaggerated and to some extent absolutely false. The deeply-earnest soldier-poet, hero of Marathon and initiate of the Eleusinian mysteries, did ponder over universal purposes. But what of the ardent patriotism of *The Persians*, the relish for geographical romance which permeates almost every play, the conviction of sin—an idea by no means habitual with the pre-Christian Greek, with his *flair* for the happy life—and the challenge launched at Zeus himself in the *Prometheus* to justify his ways to men? It is the intense and still-valid humanity underlying all of these that makes Aeschylus—at any rate in my experience—more appealing to modern minds than either of his more sophisticated and therefore, to us, more commonplace successors. To be elemental is not necessarily to be remote.

This is the opinion, as it happens, of one of the latest and best of Aeschylus's translators, Dr. T. G. Tucker, of Melbourne—

It is to be regretted [he writes in his preface to the *Prometheus*] that a prevalent but entirely erroneous notion concerning Aeschylus has been derived from this particular play. The atmosphere deliberately created in the *Prometheus* by the poet's art has by an illusion been made to belong to himself. He has consequently been regarded as by preference dealing with colossal and superhuman figures in a somewhat grandiose style. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

However tersely imaginative may be his literary style, his plays in general treat human beings on an entirely human plane with the clearest realization of the special dramatic situation.

Denial of Sympathy

The denial to Aeschylus of tender sympathy is as untrue as the suggestion that he has no sense of humour or of character. The exquisite choruses of Sea Nymphs in *Prometheus* itself, the poignant sympathy and understanding between the tortured Titan and the wandering Io, the agonized frenzy of Cassandra in the *Agamemnon*—all of these betray a human insight that is none the less sure and appealing because it never falls into maudlin sentiment. Even the specious effrontery of Clytemnestra has a certain splendour.

As for *The Suppliants*, with its fifty fugitive maidens clinging to the Argive altars to be saved from their fifty pursuing bachelor-cousins—according to Professor Gilbert Murray it represents on Aeschylus's part a championship of woman's heart against a loveless marriage, such as a Victorian melodrama would have been proud to convey.

The romantic tradition [so says his preface to his own translation] has its roots in the history of mankind. It descends from the Greeks, like almost all the rest of our poetical convention. Again and again we find that the thing which is conventional sentiment among us was genuine and practical conviction among them. People then did the things which we now consider it poetical to imagine. I cannot resist the conclusion that we have in the *Suppliants* an expression of the real conflict of emotions, practical, serious and passionate, from which this part of our romantic tradition is descended.

A remarkable thing about this confession of Professor Gilbert Murray's is not only that he has had the courage to recognize the absolutely plain and natural purpose of Aeschylus's very beautiful early play. The surprising point is Professor Murray's suggestion that maidenly dislike of marriage with an unloved man has ceased to be "genuine and practical" and become a "conventional sentiment."

It may be true that as a theme for melodrama it was rather done to death by the Victorian stage—a feminine occupant of the throne generally sets people's minds working on feminine problems of this kind. But although less may be heard of it on the stage, any scholar of life will be able to tell Professor Murray that repugnance to a loveless marriage is by no means a thing of the past. It exists among the most advanced girls of our period probably as strongly as it existed in Aeschylus's time, and ever since, and will continue to exist, in all likelihood, for a long while to come.

Scholar and Soldier

As to all these matters something seems to be wrong in the old idea that Aeschylus belonged to another world, and wrote only about beings and for people moved by passions and aims unknown to-day. Undoubtedly he believed in a divine ordinance and represented superhuman beings on the stage. But both his plays and his life show that Aeschylus had a good deal of the moral outlook of the best type of cultivated scholar-soldier of all subsequent times. He was sincere in belief as in questioning. His faith was spiritual—his ideal of Zeus, so puzzlingly unfulfilled, was a just and almighty father. He was by no means satisfied with the contented gospel of the joy of life, as expressed in the Dionysia before the introduction of tragedy. He seems to have been the first to turn tragedy itself into a fiercely moral lesson urged with the force that only drama can achieve. Possibly this was why it took him fifteen years to win the prize against less exacting rivals. Whether he was a Pythagorean or not, it is quite evident that he believed in original sin and its purgation. It is difficult not to feel that, if Aeschylus had lived under the Christian dispensation, St. Paul would have found the dramatist of his dreams.

Virile Strength

Everything in Aeschylus's life suggests virile strength and an austerity of thought if not of practice. He himself refuted

what may have been a spiteful charge of having revealed Eleusinian ritual. His self-chosen exile to Sicily suggests nothing derogatory and had nothing necessarily to do with young Sophocles's success. Aeschylus was by no means the only great dramatist to seek, like Prospero, a final refuge where "every third thought" could be his grave. One may be sure that it was at his own wish no mention was made of his plays in his epitaph. They needed no more enduring monument than themselves.

With all this there is in Aeschylus a strange luxuriance of imagination—an "exoticism," not in the hot-house sense but in that of a joy over bringing in any queer myth or far-off wonder or picturesque image just for its own sake. His geographical surveys are like glorified guide-books. This may have been partly because, as there were no guide-books in those days, these things had their instructional value. One reason, however, may have been a touch of the Oriental story-teller. Macaulay refers to this in comparing Aeschylus with Milton, though Aeschylus's attitude towards the Asian horde was the interest of a victorious foe rather than the "veneration" of a "disciple."

Macaulay on Aeschylus

The genius of the greatest of the Athenian dramatists co-operated [according to Macaulay] with the circumstances under which tragedy made its appearance. . . . In his time the Greeks had far more intercourse with the East than in the days of Homer; and they had not yet acquired that immense superiority in war, in science, and in the arts which, in the following generation, led them to treat the Asiatics with contempt. From the narrative of Herodotus it should seem that they still looked up, with the veneration of disciples, to Egypt and Assyria. At this period, accordingly, it was natural that the literature of Greece should be tinctured with the Oriental style. Aeschylus often reminds us of the Hebrew writers. The Book of Job, indeed, in conduct and diction, bears a considerable resemblance to some of his dramas.

This last suggestion has, as a matter of fact, been extended to a belief that the *Prometheus* of Aeschylus actually inspired some parts of the much revised Book of Job, as we have it. I have already noted the likeness of some of the choruses in *The Suppliants* to the Psalms of Exile. All of which goes to show that there was in Aeschylus the elemental spirituality of a great prophet coupled with the emotional sincerity and imaginative power of a great poet. Whether it meant more than this, taking for granted the Oriental intercourse to which Macaulay refers, can only be guessed at the present time.

Sophocles the Man

With neither Sophocles nor Euripides is it possible to feel quite the same personal homage to the man as well as to his work. So far as Sophocles is concerned much is to be accepted—his mastery as an artist, his development of dramatic technique, his grace of outline, the sweetness of diction that won him his title as “the Attic Bee,” his sure insight into psychology, his calm acceptance of the gods, and his casting upon the shoulders of humanity itself responsibility for most of its agonies. But when it comes to the man himself—whether as seen through his plays or through his life—there is a curious absence of inspiring qualities. His career seems to have been one of seldom ruffled success. As an armament-maker he was born rich and became richer, and there is no story of his having ever gone out of his way to help anybody or anything. We know that he was good-looking in his youth, and walked naked in front of the procession that celebrated the victory of Salamis. We know that ten years later he won the prize against Aeschylus, with Cimon and his fellow-generals as judges. He is credited with having been addicted to the pleasures of the table, good-humoured and “clubbable,” but hasty in temper over small matters, and in later life immoral. He squabbled with his son over money, and, on being challenged as a dotard, said, “If I am a dotard I am not Sophocles, and if I am Sophocles

I am not a dotard." He said that "Aeschylus was right without knowing it" and that he himself "drew men as they should be," but Euripides "as they are."

Out of these and such other stories as we have it is difficult to dig out any hint of a noble soul capable of awakening a responsive glow across twenty-three centuries. One may say, of course, that altruism had not the same hold over the Greek mind that it has over that of a present-day Christian, but the fact remains that Sophocles's life does not stir even the biographers of antiquity to any encomiums worth preserving.

"Euripides, the Human"

With all his faults both as artist and as man, Euripides stands out much more conspicuously for sympathetic suffrage. He was troubled with being a disbeliever in the gods, a misogynist deceived by two wives in succession, and driven by unpopularity to voluntary exile at the court of King Archelaus of Macedon. He is reputed to have suffered a violent death—though there appears to be no proof of this. But he at least earned the goodwill that a sense of justice in posterity is wont to extend to those who suffer for their opinions.

His plays have been subject to almost as extreme treatment as he himself was. Milton honours "sad Electra's poet" with a reverence hardly due, considering that Sophocles and Aeschylus both treat the story of Agamemnon's daughter to better and more convincing purpose. Mrs. Browning's "our Euripides, the human, with his droppings of warm tears" almost brings forgiveness for the sheer theatricality and *deus-ex-machina* endings in which Euripides occasionally indulges. He has been claimed on one side as a "realist," on the other as a romancer, and denounced by Swinburne as a "botcher." Undoubtedly he trafficked in moral shocks and surprises for their own sake: for example, his parade of Medea's gratuitous murder of her children and Phaedra's wholly unnecessary lie about Hippolytus. He revelled in

what America calls "wisecracks." He elaborated trivial and homely details in a way more suitable to what we should call domestic comedy than to high tragedy. But Mrs. Browning is right in averring that at its best his pathos lives. *The Trojan Women* is revived nowadays more often than those flawlessly devised and balanced masterpieces of Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex* and *Antigone*.

Tonic Effect

With both Sophocles and Euripides the tenor of their lives does have an effect upon their plays which makes them both differ, to their disadvantage, from Aeschylus. He, with all his fierce challenge on behalf of mankind, had faith in Zeus—faith that the ultimate purpose of our existence was something worth living and dying for. The result is that his plays—even the *Oresteia* trilogy, with its ending in Orestes's acquittal and the placation of the pursuing Furies—have a tonic effect. It is not merely because of a "happy ending." This may be so easily tacked on and be in itself meaningless or, in reality, the reverse of happy. It is because one learns and feels the faith of Aeschylus in every line.

In Sophocles, on the other hand, though he accepts the gods on trust, one does not get this sense of a dramatic Captain Greatheart taking his audience through horror to hope. Here and there are beautiful things like the ode to Love the Conqueror in *Antigone*, exquisite descriptions of landscape, like that in Philoctetes's farewell to Lemnos, and unforgettable visions of stricken nobility in *Oedipus* and *Ajax*, set against their background in statuesque dignity, yet human always. But the end of it all is just resignation to an unknown will of which the only thing sure is that punishment will arrive for inevitable human error. He tells us that no man can be called happy until he is dead, and that old age learns too late to be wise. The best ethical guidance that devoted scholarship can get out of him is the "irony" made familiar by Bishop Thirlwall and elaborated by Sir Richard Jebb in his essay upon *The Genius of Sophocles*.

Irony

"This irony," says Sir Richard, "depends on the principle that the dramatic poet stands aloof from the world which he creates." Certainly Sophocles's personal character and conduct do not often get "into the picture"—although Oedipus, with his self-satisfaction and hasty temper, has always had, for me, a suggestion of his author. But for the modern mind, to which dramatic illusion is a mere convention—a conscious, momentary submission—it is a great question whether an "aloof" dramatist can claim "creation." The story is hardly ever created by the author—not even, sometimes, in supposedly original details. The actors and audience share in the creation of character. All ideas, too, come out of experience and accordingly can hardly be described as created. The one lasting thing that is created is the effect of the play as a whole after it is over. It is a matter of supreme importance whether the author has had anything from his inner self to give to this effect. With Sophocles, according to the most favourably prejudiced authorities, the gift is just irony and aloofness.

Here is Sophocles's view in Professor Plumptre's words—

Men promise much and perform little. They think they are marching onward to fame and greatness, when the ground is opening beneath their feet, and they are sinking to destruction. They boast of their strength when they are really displaying their weakness. Like Oedipus, they solve the riddle of the Sphinx, and are blind to the riddle of their own lives.

This may have been a message of very great value to victorious Athens of the days of Pericles—to a pleasure-loving people, many of whom found the joy and colour of life in a pleasant climate and fertile country all-sufficing. To us of to-day, assailed with much vaster problems, thoroughly sophisticated and yet hungry for spiritual guidance, the extent to which "irony and aloofness" are helpful is less apparent. Thanks to universal immediacy of information, we know all about the worst that destiny can bring, whether

to nations or to men. We have records of the misguided efforts of more than two thousand years that were unavailable to the Attic dramatists. What our world is yearning for is not ironic aloofness, but some radio-active spirit that will help mankind into a better way by faith and by example.

The Rationalist

One finds this even less in the life and art of Euripides. He is—rightly enough, doubtless—claimed as a modern. It is another matter whether he has anything to give to modernity which modernity does not already know only too well. According to Dr. Verrall in *Euripides the Rationalist*, his stories assume that “the ‘gods’ do not exist.” But this point of view is hardly new to us. According to Coleridge he “brought tragedy nearer to the real world than his predecessors had ever done.” This again is hardly necessary when the real world is “too much with us.”

As a dramatist Euripides found refuge for his frank disbelief all too frequently just in sentiment and thrill. He was prompted by an “angry fancy” to revelations of viciousness alike in men and women which just rob them of our sympathy. There is a wild beauty about the sadistic orgies of the *Bacchae*—written in Macedon and produced after his death by his son—but if they represent Euripides’s last word on religion he has not much to tell the modern world in that regard. His staple product may be described as romantic “melodrama,” in the musical sense of the word as well as the other. He is obviously not to be denied dramatic genius and a lively imagination. He was a poet, a wit, and a philosopher. He at least does not “stand aloof,” though some of his “irony” is of a comparatively cheap and superficial kind—as, for instance, in the satire mixed with the pathos of *Alcestis*, presented by the late William Poel as a satire alone. His surviving “satyric” play, *The Cyclops*, so finely translated by Shelley, shows what Euripides could do intentionally in this much-debated kind.

On the whole, much is to be said for Aristophanes’s verdict

in favour of Aeschylus after the contest in *The Frogs* between the shades of the elder dramatist and Euripides, with Dionysus as judge. Though he had pilloried Euripides for twenty years and was still out to ridicule his memory, Aristophanes is really juster to him than might have been expected in the circumstances.

The life we know, [he makes Euripides claim] that was my subject. . . . I never drugged them with windy bombast, or stampeded them with the jingling accoutrements of legendary swashbucklers.

This is allowing Euripides a point he certainly does not deserve to make against Aeschylus, who was by no means confined to battle-scenes. Neither *Prometheus* nor *The Suppliants* nor the *Oresteia* is any more warlike in its atmosphere than Euripides's own plays. Moreover, Euripides himself habitually intermingled "the life he knew" with that of legend. Even if he had not done so, it is extremely doubtful whether realism is the test of tragic excellence.

Father of Criticism

Upon this and other matters we have now the most renowned of all critical authorities to refer to. It is time we came to Aristotle—father of dramatic criticism among countless other things. He should have left nothing unsaid about the three dramatists we have been discussing, considering that he was born only twenty years after Sophocles's death, and as a Thracian must have had a special interest in Euripides's last adventure.

It is one of the paradoxes of history that Aristotle's *Poetic*—an assortment of lecture notes, badly put together, atrociously corrupt, and amounting altogether to not much more than a modern magazine article, should have dominated and gone far to stifle so much dramatic effort even after a score of centuries.

The historical value of Aristotle's record of facts and the principle of his approach—rather than his actual criticism,

which is vulnerable at almost every point—has given this last a power out of all proportion to its real scope and value to the art with which it deals. A precise logician, political and social philosopher, mathematician and practical scientist, Aristotle was the last man in the world who should have attempted to found a school in dramatic criticism—a craft in which he could never have hoped to be even a suitable practitioner. He took all knowledge for his province; but knowledge is a possession of infinitely less value in the theatre than a sensitive temperament, keen emotions, sympathy with the ignorant as well as the wise, and a faculty of being ever ready to recur to primitive simplicity.

His idea of criticism was to give laws for the theatre on the elementary logical principle of beginning with a supposed truism as a major premiss, following up with a minor, and forming thereby a conclusion. He regarded drama as something of which it could be said that if A equals B and B equals C, then A would be certain to equal C. Unfortunately that is not the way things happen at all in the art of the theatre. A may be equal to B at one time and in one place, and be quite different to it before or after or elsewhere.

“Beginning—Middle—End”

He very nearly touched rock-bottom with his famous axiom that a primal characteristic of drama is that it is finite—it must have a beginning, a middle, and an end. This may be true enough as regards performances. Even Chinese plays that go on for days, and “non-stop” shows, and performances which finish prematurely, or upon which the curtain refuses to fall—all must have a beginning and end sometime. But it is not true of the drama that is performed, of which we may be seeing only a small part or an extension, and of which all three previously accepted essentials may at another performance be either mixed up or transposed or absent altogether. None the less, this “beginning—middle—and end” idea is at least a good, practical axiom to be getting on with.

It is also about as far as Aristotle goes towards being unchallengeably right. The necessity for a beginning, middle, and end of every performance is undoubtedly the basis of nearly all dramatic conventions, which are binding only in so far as they are inevitable. It is this that distinguishes drama from the unceasing flux of the world's life, and so makes unity of action obvious—the only unity that counts for modern purposes.

“Imitation of an Action”

His definition of drama as the “imitation of an action” is not nearly so sound. “Expression by action” would be much nearer the mark. Drama need not—in theory, at any rate—be confined to imitation. A real action may be devised as drama and become so. But reality is just needless and cumbrous for the purpose merely of expression. Its extent is a matter of technical expediency. An actor will probably sit upon a real chair to eat a fictitious banquet.

Upon these fallible foundations Aristotle builds his theories of tragedy and of comedy. They are invariably interesting and provocative and sometimes helpful. So acute a mind could not fail to say something worth hearing on any subject. But if Aristotle had had, as I have had, forty years' experience as a practising dramatic critic, he would have learnt that laws from any source are applicable only where they are inevitable. When they are pronounced by an external and purely intellectual law-giver on a basis of supposed cold fact, any attempt to impose them could have only a sterilizing effect. This is, indeed, what happened in France and elsewhere.

Definition of Tragedy

From a historical point of view, on the other hand, every line of Aristotle's *Poetic* has had such far-reaching influence upon the drama even of to-day that his leading points must be given in any book which has dramatic criticism for its main theme. Perhaps the best way to deal with them would

be to set out a selection of Aristotle's most important aphorisms and to suggest as briefly as may be which of them are unassailable and which are not so.

Here, then, are the aphorisms from the *Poetic* which seem to me most worthy to be set down, beginning with the far-famed definition of tragedy—

Tragedy is an imitation of an illustrious and perfect action, possessing magnitude, in pleasing language . . . by men acting, and not through narration, through pity and fear effecting a purification from like passions.

Even now no one is quite sure what Aristotle meant by this "purification," what were the passions to be purged away, and whether the fear was immediate terror—the result of complete illusion—or just a sense of warning by example. Lessing suggests that it means "pity transferred to ourselves." This is happily put, but a subtlety of which Aristotle was probably innocent. Recent psychologists have put forward an idea that the sadistic instinct of an audience would be satisfied by a mimic display and so would not need to fulfil itself by cruelty in real life. But this is certainly not what Aristotle says. Possibly a spiritual analogy of the purgative effect of genuine fright was in Aristotle's mind. At Sir John Martin Harvey's modern production of *Oedipus Rex* many people fainted. Pity, without fear, broadens the sympathies, and takes people "out of themselves." But pity alone reduces tragedy to melodrama. The plain truth is that we are hearing of an attitude towards drama which sophisticated modern audiences very rarely share.

Tragedy differs from comedy; for the one seeks to imitate worse, and the other better men than are. . . . Comedy is an imitation of bad characters, but the ridiculous only . . . turpitude unattended with pain, and not destructive.

A very rough and flimsy contrast, taking a narrow view of both tragedy and comedy. There are no men at all in *Prometheus*. What we should call "high comedy" had, of course, not been anticipated.

Tragedy is especially limited by one period of the sun, or admits but a small variation from this period; but the epic is not defined within a certain time, and in this it differs; though at first they observed the same conduct with tragedy.

It is clear that Aristotle is not to be blamed for what was afterwards quoted as a law regarding the unity of time. He rather suggests it as a compulsory but regrettable limitation—on account of the chorus, who could not be imagined coming back years after. Even so he takes care to admit that it had not always mattered.

Manners

Tragedy is an imitation not of men, but of actions. . . . Without action tragedy cannot exist; but it may exist without manners. By manners I mean those things by which we say that persons have a certain character.

If any one just sets moral speeches and well-framed sentiments in a string, he will not produce the essence of tragedy. That will be much more a tragedy which uses these things as subordinate, and which contains a fable and combination of incidents.

The parts by which a fable most allures the soul are revolutions and discoveries.

The practical mind of Aristotle is here beginning to stray from the purpose of expression to the delight in tricks and turns natural to a mathematical habit of thought. Though variety of action has its modern value, "revolutions and discoveries" are, as such, mechanical. They have grown so hackneyed that they have long ceased to "allure the souls" of cultivated modern audiences on their own account. Sudden changes of fortune and the discovery of hitherto unknown relationships have now to be excused rather than relied upon as dramatic incidents.

The fable is the principal part and, as it were, the soul of tragedy. The manners are next in rank . . . but the sentiments rank third; and by them I mean the power of explaining what is inherent in the subject and adapted to it.

Here again Aristotle is attempting to reduce to rule of thumb something that is too complicated and evasive for any such rules at all. The "one-two-three" alinement breaks down even over Aeschylus's *The Suppliants*, in which the "principal part" is neither fable, manners, nor sentiments. As applied to *Hamlet* the order would be absurd.

Poetry and Spectacle

Melopoeia (music) is the greatest of the embellishments. Spectacle is the least pertaining to poetry. . . . The power of tragedy remains even when unaccompanied with scenic apparatus.

A whole is that which has a beginning, middle and end. . . . Hence it is necessary that those who compose fables properly should neither begin them casually nor end them casually.

As in bodies and in animals it is necessary there should be magnitude, but such as can easily be seen; thus also in fables there should be length, but this such as can easily be remembered.

The fable is always more beautiful the greater it is, if at the same time it is perspicuous.

The fable should be the imitation of one action and of the whole of this. The parts of the transactions should be so arranged that, if any one of them were transposed or taken away, the whole would become different.

Poetry is more philosophic and more deserving of attention than history. For poetry speaks more of universals, but history of particulars.

One of Aristotle's most useful assertions. It is still not always remembered by writers of historical drama that informed imagination is better than fact. *σπουδαίος*, here translated according to Buckley's version "deserving of attention," has no corresponding English word. The root is the same as that of our word *speed*, but the meaning is a combination of efficient and earnest. It is translated

“serious” by Fyfe in the Loeb Edition, and it is the word from which Matthew Arnold got his “higher seriousness.” But “serious” might imply dullness and inefficiency, which would be the exact opposite of Aristotle’s intention. Possibly “vital” would come nearest. It is the word translated “illustrious” in the definition of tragedy.

Episodes

Of simple plots and actions, the episodic are the worst. I call the plot episodic in which it is neither probable nor necessary that the episodes follow each other. Such plots are composed by bad poets through their own want of ability, but by good poets on account of the players.

Of things which are from fortune those appear to be most admirable which seem to happen as it were by design.

Discovery is, as the name implies, a change from ignorance to knowledge, or into friendship or hatred, of those who are destined to prosperous or adverse fortune. The discovery is most beautiful when at the same time there are, as in the *Oedipus*, revolutions—that is, mutations of actions into a contrary condition.

Vicissitudes

It is not proper that worthy men should be represented as changed from prosperity to adversity, for this is neither a subject of terror nor commiseration, but is impious. Nor should depraved characters be represented as changed from adversity to prosperity; for this is the most foreign from tragedy of all things. It neither appeals to moral sense, nor is piteous, nor fearful. Nor again must a very depraved man be represented as having fallen from prosperity into adversity. Such a composition will, indeed, possess moral tendency, but not pity and fear. . . . There remains, therefore, the character between these—a character who neither excels in virtue nor is changed through depravity into misfortune from a state of great renown and prosperity, but has experienced this change through some error.

Here we have Aristotle bound and stultified as a critic by the very rules that he laid down gratuitously for the

dramatist. No one except himself had decreed that a tragedy must necessarily engender pity and fear; but he takes for granted that this is a hard-and-fast law and so finds himself in a fix. His suggestion that it is "impious" to present a worthy man changed from prosperity to adversity, and that the sufferings of a depraved man can be neither piteous nor fearful, suggests that at heart he was very like what we should call a first-class prig.

Simple fables which terminate unhappily appear to be most tragical, if they are properly acted.

He who hears . . . may be seized with horror and feel pity from events without the assistance of sight. . . . But to effect this through spectacle is more inartificial and requires great expense.

This lapse into "pay-sheet" criticism is rather a terrible foretaste of critical mentality in some present-day quarters. It is evident that the "almighty" drachma had already its influence on art!

Seeking for Subjects

If an enemy kills an enemy, he does not show anything which is an object of pity . . . but when a brother kills a brother, or a son his father, or a mother her son, or a son his mother, or intends to do it or does anything else of the like kind, such subjects are to be sought for.

The idea of a dramatist "seeking for subjects" in a spirit which degrades drama to the level of a newspaper crime-story is something one would rather forget Aristotle had ever stooped to. The "man-bites-dog" theory of news would obviously have pleased him. He seems by now to have completely lost the idea of drama as a personal expression, either on the dramatist's part or on that of any one else.

To intend to perpetrate a deed knowingly and not to perpetrate it is wicked and not tragical, because it is void of pathos.

With respect to manners . . . both a woman and a slave may be good; though, perhaps, of these, the one is less good and the other wholly bad.

The poet should, as much as possible, co-operate with the actor. . . . He agitates others who is himself agitated, and he excites others to anger who is himself most truly enraged.

Sincerity

In this last aphorism we get Aristotle's one hint of the quality which is now the first and last demanded of any emotional play. It is the quality underlying the word most commonly on the lips of every seriously-minded critic—sincerity. I take this to mean the expression of some idea or passion, some joy or sorrow or inspiring thought or scene or event, suggested by reality but expressed by the imagination and art of the author and actor to an audience who recognize its truth in both mind and heart, and thus have in the theatre a life beyond life.

It has to be granted that Aristotle is dealing with an especial kind of play—the tragedy whose form he is at pains to limit and whose contents he endeavours to analyse. It has to be confessed, however, that he never gets through form and material to the spirit of free human expression and response which keeps the art of drama alive.

To him art is artifice. Save for his last casual and almost contemptuous allusion, what the dramatist really feels—not to mention the actor—does not count. Aristotle's ideal is the "well-made play," with surprises and discoveries and revolutions of fortune's wheel and other tricks of entertainment. Even his most-approved example, the *Oedipus* of Sophocles, is praised by him chiefly for the mere adroitness with which the incidents are arranged. To him—as he says in almost so many words—the construction is the play, and even that must conform to a little set of crippling and arbitrary rules based on obvious but none the less fallible digital calculations.

We shall, perhaps, have an opportunity later of seeing the result of this treatment upon the drama and criticism of subsequent times.

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CHAPTER V

FROM ATHENS TO ROME

WHATEVER the limitations of Aristotle's *Poetic*, they were excusable, after all, in days before dramatic criticism had become an art in itself, and in circumstances that were all against a full personal expression on his part. The fact remains that we have to wait over two centuries for any new outlook upon the theatre. It came then not from Greece but from Rome. Moreover, there was one element of the Greek drama with which Aristotle failed to deal, save for some perfunctory references.

This is comedy. So far as its history is concerned he is content to tell us that "the transitions of comedy have escaped our knowledge, because it was not at first an object of attention." Those were lenient times for research! It seems a thousand pities that the well-thumbed Stagirite, with his "one-two-three" and his firm touch on "because" and "therefore," did not essay a theme which would have tested his sensibilities even more effectively than tragedy. It is supposed that he intended to do so, and the result may have been lost. How he would have brought—or did bring—the riotous laughter and lyric loveliness of Aristophanes into his arithmetical drill-ground certainly baffles conjecture.

Aristophanes and Plato

As it is, most of the eleven comedies that survive to us out of Aristophanes's fifty-four are in their spirit so gloriously spontaneous, so rich in their relish of the present without a care of the future, that one might as well criticize the birds' songs whose magic and rhythm he himself caught, or a Bank Holiday jaunt, or an uproar at a political meeting. It is true that they were built up on conventions, which I have already outlined, as ancient as those of tragedy and equally traceable to religious observance. Some doubt, we

have seen, exists as to the connexion of tragedy with the worship of Dionysus, as god of the four seasons that brought fruitfulness to the pleasant vineyards of Attica; but there is no question about the comedy of Aristophanes still retaining that popular deity's sanction for jollity. People who worry about Aristophanes being coarse do not seem to realize that what went before him had been very little more than an unashamed phallic celebration, compared with which mere "coarseness" was an intellectual refinement. This is not counting the imagination, the keen satire, the many-coloured picture of life and unmatched nature-poetry with which he improved the occasion.

Democratic Drama

Never since, most certainly, has the same enfranchisement of mind and heart been won and used. This is to some extent, perhaps, because there has never been a genius of the same type coinciding with an ideal democracy—at any rate, ideal for the theatre—one in which every citizen could go to the theatre, at the State's charge of two obols if necessary, and took at once a personal and communal interest in what went on there. The nearest thing that we have had to Aristophanes in this country within memory would be a mixture of Gilbert-and-Sullivan, the old-time music-hall, and revue in the days before it degenerated into a meaningless and unindividual "non-stop" show. But how different the appeal to "tired business men" from the eager and turbulent throngs to which the Old Comedy addressed itself!

Aristophanes himself was, as we have seen, a first-class critic of his fellow-dramatists. His comparison between Aeschylus and Euripides in *The Frogs* makes it clear that both he and his audience must have known the great triad of tragic poets by heart—a state of affairs which could hardly be reproduced in our time, even if the triad were there. To Aristophanes himself we know there was one person the value of whose approval might well "outweigh a whole

theatre of others." This was Plato. Though Aristophanes had made Socrates his butt in *The Clouds*, the younger philosopher brings them together in the *Symposium* in circumstances which leave no doubt as to Plato's high opinion of Aristophanes—and Socrates's own. Not only does Aristophanes contribute to the discussion upon Love in characteristic fashion, but he and his fellow-dramatist, Agathon, are left alone with Socrates at the finish. It was unfortunate that Aristophanes is recorded to have gone to sleep while Socrates "was driving them to the admission that the same man could have the knowledge required for writing comedy and tragedy."

Plutarch's Opinion

On the other side, after four centuries, we have Plutarch. In comparing Aristophanes with Menander, the great biographer is "cruel to be unkind." He can find no good in Aristophanes at all.

The witticisms of Aristophanes are [he says] bitter and rough, and possess a sharpness that wounds and bites. . . . With him roguishness is not urbane but malicious, rusticity not simple but silly, facetiousness not playful but ridiculous, and love not joyous, but licentious. For the fellow seems to have written his poetry, not for any decent person, but the indecent and wanton lines for the licentious, the slanderous and bitter passages for the envious.

One gathers that, for all his skill in comparative biography, Plutarch lacked that robust Rabelaisian sense of humour which is needed if Aristophanes is to be properly appreciated.

A Modern View

How unfair Plutarch was is suggested by a recent tribute from Mr. Gilbert Norwood, an out-and-out lover of comedy's "old master." Mr. Norwood, in his *Greek Comedy*, writes—

Aristophanes, no less finished a townsman than Charles Lamb, loved the country as passionately as Thoreau. He rivals

Pindar in poetic imagination, Dickens in his zest for fun, even buffoonery; at one moment he rejoices in style with all Pater's thrilled delicacy, at another he is as Philistine as a cart-horse. His only lack was compassion. So it was that when he and his City fell on evil days he found nothing to sustain him, no interest in life save to rake over embers from which the fire had departed. But while the Empire yet stood he rejoiced in life and art, fun and politics, pleasure and wisdom, during that radiant age when all these were still interwoven, pouring forth the treasures of his poetry with prodigal splendour. That is the secret of his charm and of his immortality.

Even before Athens fell to the victorious Lysander in 404 B.C., and before Aristophanes's last plays had been written, the glory and the freedom had departed. Quite apart from the dramatist's own temperament, political pressure seems to have had its crushing effect—

Then succeeded the old comedy, which had no little merit [so Horace tells us in his *Art of Poetry*] but its liberty degenerated into licence and into a violence which the law must check. The law was submitted to, and then to its shame the chorus became dumb, being deprived of the right of abuse.

Lost Dramatists

Through the long list of vanished writers of the Middle and New Comedy the only thing of critical value that has reached us from Athens after the loss of its independence is the universal adulation heaped upon Menander's comparatively polished comedies of amorous intrigue and domestic adventure, so largely "conveyed" to us through Terence and to a smaller extent through Plautus. The old democratic spirit had gone, and with it high imaginings and rough satire together. The actual theatres both at Athens and throughout the Graeco-Roman world became more and more solid and splendid, and better-equipped. But most of the later Greek dramas of which the scrip went up in flames at the burning of the Alexandrine library do not seem to have been the worst loss there suffered.

The Slave in Comedy

One thing which characterized them did have an effect upon the stage's future that has hardly lost its influence yet. This was the prominence that came to be given to the slave—the cunning rogue who was to make his way through Rome and the *Commedia dell'Arte* into the drama of the Renaissance—and so into Shakespeare and Molière. In Oriental drama he was already installed. Whether he crossed the Aegean or made his arrival on both sides independently is a question that must be left for the present.

From Horace, who looked upon Athens as his Oxford, one gathers that even in his day the old Dionysus ritual was not gone. As his already-quoted *Art of Poetry* shows, tragedies were still followed by the burlesque satyr play. Otherwise he would hardly have given young Piso such grave advice as an aspiring dramatist—

Insult not the tragic Muse [he writes] by making her babble out silly verses. If she appears amidst the wanton satyrs, let her be somewhat reserved, as a matron bid to dance on holidays.

Pass from grave to gay [he enjoins his young disciple] only in such a way as that any god or hero, just before conspicuous in regal gold and purple, now joining this company, may not be as one shifting from a palace into low taverns, there to use vulgar language. . . . When the Fauns are fetched from the woods, my judgment is that they need to be careful lest they appear like those born where the streets meet, and almost as loungers in the Forum, and their verses sound as the words of our effeminate young men, or lest they talk in coarse and disreputable language. For thus are disgusted the knights, the free-born, the rich, who will not endure the play with patience or reward the poet, however much the buyers of chick-peas and roasted walnuts may approve.

One cannot help recognizing some of the snobbery of the smart "stallite" at a modern theatre about this concern for the "rich and free-born." It never troubled Aristophanes, though he was, in fact, a well-to-do Tory: whereas Horace

would not have had even his Sabine farm without Maecenas, and his own father had been a slave.

Menander

All we know of Menander is still fragmentary and anecdotal, but it says much for the value of surviving tributes that we can go quite a long way towards assessing his achievement even though we have not a single complete play extant. A great deal is due to the labours of modern scholars over the papyrus discovered at Aphroditopolis in 1905. As it is, we can visualize Menander almost as well as we can Oscar Wilde. We know that he was socially a scented exquisite, "moving with a delicate and languid air." We know that he was notorious for his *amours*, and a friend of Epicurus. We know, too, that he was a favourite pupil of Theophrastus, who was Aristotle's successor at the Lyceum and author of those still-delightful *Characters* which have in them the germ of so many future comedy-creations. Theophrastus also wrote a critical work on *Comedy*, which may quite possibly have done something to inspire his brilliant disciple.

Many of Menander's phrases are household words still, whether through Terence or not. St. Paul quoted him to the effect that "evil communications corrupt good manners." Even Terence's most famous line, "I am a man. Nothing human is alien to me," has been claimed for Menander. Terence, if the story be true that he drowned himself because he lost his adaptations of a hundred of Menander's plays, would hardly have minded the transfer of credit.

Family Plays

It is clear that we do owe to Menander the emergence of the comedy-form that has practically survived to the present day. He and the forgotten intermediaries of the Middle Comedy drew it out of a gallimaufry of religious rite, tragic

opera, spectacular ballet, and riotous burlesque. His comedies of household life, with their prodigal fathers, scapegrace sons, justly suspicious wives, marriageable daughters, mercenary light-o'-loves, and always the clever and witty slave to unloose the tangle, are still the basis of our social drama. They are to be seen little more than adapted in some of the most admired studies of harum-scarum family-life upon our stage at the present moment.

When Menander created the whole convention of making a play out of a family and a love-affair he had no cosy little intimate theatre to do it in. He had to manage it on a huge stage arranged at every point for open-air spectacle before large audiences. The actors were still masked. This made anything like subtlety of expression impossible. On the other hand, mistaken identity could be arranged much more easily than it was by Shakespeare in *The Comedy of Errors*, which may have come from Menander through Plautus's *Menaechmi*. Also there was on Menander's stage practically no possibility of representing an interior visible to the whole audience. The stage had to represent a street. The result was that no prolonged scene could be carried on with the heroine, as well-brought-up Greek girls were not supposed to go in the street at all.

Merchant Class

It is noticeable that—apart from the lingering convention of a deity-spoken prologue—the characters are not, like those in the Old Comedy, gods and celebrities in imaginative disguise. They are commonplace citizens of the merchant class—very much the same sort of people as are the staple of our own household comedy and farce. The slave is not only prominent but nearly always the wittiest, most intelligent, and most sympathetic character in the play. This was not absolutely new. Aristophanes in *The Wasps* has a couple of slaves, Sosias and Xanthias, who remain throughout as managers of mirth. But it was Menander who first brought the adroit serving-man habitually and popularly to the front.

It is probably to Menander, too, that we owe those characters of Plautine comedy who were to link the ages—the braggart soldier, *Miles Gloriosus*, ancestor of “Auntient Pistol,” and the hungry Parasite, who may have survived, much transmogrified, and mixed up with his equally ravenous Atellane friend, Bucco, in the pie-consuming clown of Victorian pantomime. The tattered soldier of fortune and his rapsallion associates must have been pretty common social types in the Grecian cities after the break-up of Alexander’s empire—more so, probably than in Rome, where the military calling was better organized and respected.

Comedy of Manners

But it was not so much in extravagant characters that the comedies of Menander marked the arrival of a new epoch. It was in the sympathetic human reality of it all—the presenting of the play for no other purpose than as an expression of interest in the actual lives of actual people and to give “the very body of the time his form and pressure.” The break-up of democratic ideals had, one can see, made the communal life of the city less satisfying. Interests were more concentrated on individuals—the duties and pleasures, excitements and anxieties of men and women, each for his or her own sake, in travel, in commerce, and at home. Certain types had, as I have already mentioned, been collected by Menander’s master Theophrastus in his *Characters*—the Backbiter, the Gull, the Boor, the Gossip, and so on. All that was needed was a plot, dialogue, and a love-affair, which Menander was eminently capable of supplying, and the thing was done—the Comedy of Manners was born.

Something more, too, there was—a grace of verse and glamour of adventure that suggests what was long after to be called romance. A strong hint of this may be found, for instance, in *The Shorn Lady*, with its story of the twin brother and sister from Corinth, separated after a shipwreck; of

how the boy was adopted by a rich woman, and the girl, Glycera, was given into the protection of a soldier; and of how they came to live next door to each other, and the soldier-lover cut off Glycera's hair on account of having seen her kissing her brother. In the end, of course, the sore-tried twins met their father, who had grown rich again, and Glycera married the soldier. In this and in other of the freshly-discovered fragments of Menander there are a pleasant sparkle and sense of light pathos over genteel distresses, together with discovery and development of character in and by the events of the story. These set him in a class far above the rough farce of Plautus, and make Terence's acknowledged debt all the more understandable.

Realistic Romance

In a curious way Menander joined the living humanity of Aristophanes with the realistic romance and theatre-sense of Euripides. His Schnitzler-like predilection for sophisticated and fugitive love-affairs may have been due largely to his temperament, and partly to a shrewd sense of what he could do best. It is true that only eight of his plays won the prize out of over a hundred; but he never lacked admirers. The story of his having drowned himself on account of the rivalry of Philemon need not be taken too seriously. His fame grew continuously after his death. "Plato and Menander" were the authors that Horace took with him into the country when he fled from the noise of the Roman Saturnalia. As for Plutarch, he sees no flaw—

Menander's charm makes him utterly satisfying, for in these works that present with universal appeal the splendours of Greece, society finds its culture, the schools their study, the theatre its triumph. The nature and possibilities of literary elegance were by him revealed for the first time. He has invaded every quarter of the world with his invincible glamour, bringing all hearts under the sway of the Greek language. What sound reason does the cultivated man ever find for entering a theatre, except Menander?

Latin Plays

Tantalizing as is all that has been discovered about Menander, much less is known of his immediate forerunners and contemporaries on the Athenian stage. The appraising of his and their Latin echoes, Plautus and Terence, becomes all the more partial and precarious. Each Christmas, as it happens, every London dramatic critic has to try to say something fresh about one or the other of these, in view of the annual Latin play in the old dormitory of Westminster School, honoured on at least one occasion by the presence of the King and Queen.

This is a fascinating experience—so long as it is not repeated too often. It is a treasured memory, certainly, to a good many of the boys themselves—the grey stone walls; the festival glow of red baize and the dresses of adoring mothers and sisters; the naturally interested approval of the teaching staff; the signalled and drilled applause from the *claque* of youngsters in the gallery; the occasional good performance in front of the painted Athenian scene; the original Latin epilogue, composed by faithful and brilliant “Old Westminsters,” with its topical puns.

I personally have to confess that, though I have attended pretty regularly in my forty years as a London critic, I began after about twenty years of them to lose the edge of my enthusiasm over Plautus and Terence for their own sakes. I grew tired of the little round of not-too-sympathetic characters. The libidinous old fathers, the sons with their dilemmas over dancing-girls and foundlings, the chicaneries of the resourceful slave—these things do begin to pall in course of time for present-day entertainment, just as eternal repetitions of *Our Boys* and *Charley's Aunt* have done in their own turn.

Plautus

From the historical point of view, however, the value of Plautus and Terence remains as surely as the difference between them. On the one side we have in Plautus the rough provincial Italian—the one-time Umbrian mill-hand and

stage-carpenter, "flatfooted," as the nick-name we know him by tells us, and stout-figured on his own confession—the Thespis of Latin comedy. Though he used the Greek plots and characters, there is no question of the native Italian quality he gave them. He infused into them the spirit of the rough, rustic farces and impromptu mimes that were indigenous to Italy—especially those of the little Campanian town of Atella, which were highly popular in Rome, and may have been the source of Punch, as we shall see later. In Terence, on the other hand, we have the astute cosmopolitan from Carthage, Scipio's friend and favourite, born in slavery, but described by Caesar as a "half-Menander" and with something of the Athenian's culture as well as his genius.

It is to be remembered that Plautus died in 184 B.C. at the age of seventy, after having been a popular playwright in Rome for forty years. Terence was then a boy of ten. So Plautus may be credited with having "blazed the trail" of the dramatist in Rome. He had nothing like the intelligent and responsible audience of democratic Athens to which Aristophanes appealed. He had to please an excitable but materialistic public, in which classes were mixed but far more strongly differentiated than in the Athens of two centuries before. The general taste leaned to the attractions of the circus—the gladiatorial games and fighting of wild beasts. These were the things that Plautus had to compete with. His success—and capture of immortality in winning it—is the best answer to those who find him coarse and occasionally tedious. It was his *Miles Gloriosus*, with its braggart-soldier borrowed from Menander, that inspired in 1551 the head master of Westminster, Nicholas Udall, to write *Ralph Roister Doister*, the first surviving English comedy.

Terence

Terence did not have the same task—nor, perhaps, the same opportunity; for he died when he was thirty-six, and the six plays that we have are probably all he produced.

Not only more cultivated but, though a servile-born African, a far finer master of Latinity than Plautus ever pretended to be, Terence is more "presentable" in every sense of the word. His *Andria*, *Phormio*, and *Adelphi* will probably remain always favourites for revival at Westminster. They have been indirectly the inspiration of countless modern comedies—on both sides of the Channel.

Seneca

While the Roman theatre produced at its best only two imitators of Greek comedy, its tragic record is even more barren. Seneca alone bridges a gulf of fifteen centuries. Some doubt exists as to whether the dramatist and the philosopher-statesman who was Nero's tutor were one and the same man. This is enhanced by the fact that Seneca, the philosopher, occurs as a character in his own or his namesake's *Octavia*. It is not a question that is likely to be settled, nor does it very much matter. The tragedies of Seneca are just as dead as their writer—whichever he was—with their dreary pages of declamatory argument and ghastly recountal.

The only reason for mentioning them nowadays is their undoubted influence upon the drama of the Renaissance—both on the Continent and in England. The ghost in *Hamlet* was quite probably an idea borrowed from Seneca by Kyd, or whoever was Shakespeare's predecessor in the theme. Ben Jonson's use of Seneca as a model for his own tragedies is sufficient explanation of their dullness and pedantry. The reason of Seneca's survival through the Middle Ages to figure in the repertory, at any rate of the Elsinore players, must be simply that he was the only Latin tragedian whose plays were available. No play of his is recorded as having been modernly produced in this country. But there are still people who wipe the dust off for duty's sake. A scholarly chapter upon him is to be found in Mr. C. E. Vaughan's *Types of Tragic Drama*. In comparing him with Euripides as a pioneer of romance, Mr. Vaughan says—

The rhetoric of the Roman is more than questionable; but in command of all the effects of horror he is hardly to be surpassed. . . . When we consider the vast influence which he wielded on the classical revival . . . the strange blending of classical with romantic which meets us in the earlier Elizabethans is to be understood. It would be difficult to say whether the classical or the romantic drama of modern times stands more deeply in his debt.

So much for Roman comedy and tragedy, and drama of the hybrid but emotionally and intellectually appealing order that was ultimately to be classed as romance. Even Plautus approaches this now and then—as in *Rudens* and *The Captives*. Small as the moderately valuable output proves to have been, the Roman theatre was much more splendid and by no means less popular than anything that had been evolved on the other side of the Adriatic. But it was busy over other matters. The circus and the gladiatorial games were reinforced by a great deal of spectacular ballet. These exhibitions, which were simply for the gratification of the senses, have left behind them—doubtless deservedly—no enduring vestige. They were of the moment and for the moment. One of the apparent paradoxes of history is this inability of Rome as mistress of the world under the early Caesars to produce anything remotely worthy of itself in the domain of drama.

Pompey's Theatre

From an architectural point of view nothing was wanting. Pompey's theatre held about 40,000. It was thus more than twelve times as big as Drury Lane. This was one reason, perhaps, why the only arts of the theatre that flourished continuously under the Empire in Rome were those of ballet and of pantomime. No human voice could have made speech intelligible. While the drama was to a large extent dumb, the audience was noisy and largely alien. A huge awning of silk covered the central tiers, where an enervated aristocracy lounged at its ease. Beyond was a hurly-burly

of buying, selling, begging, and quarrelling. Though the theatre officially included a Temple of Venus, this was a mere trick to avoid closure. One reason for the cultivation of pantomime and ballet, in preference to drama, was the ease with which riots could be provoked among idle hosts of frequenters. Lulled into harmlessness by games and doles, these could easily be stirred to a dangerous outburst. Under the Empire, entertainment and audience alike grew more luxurious and less exalted in their artistic aims. The proprieties, once rigidly observed, were gradually relaxed, until the "show" became little else but an excuse for intrigue. A time arrived when the Emperor demanded applause for posturing in his own "divine" person on the public stage.

Idols of Pantomime

Some pantomimists, like Paris and Bathyllus, whose attractions were in their looks and scandalous celebrity, became the idols of palace and populace. According to Martial and Juvenal the stage was frequently transformed into a scene of sadistic as well as sensual debauch. An audience accustomed to gladiatorial butcheries found the make-believe of pantomime not sufficiently thrilling. So criminals were borrowed from the prisons to be publicly tortured or even crucified as part of the performance. Ovid, who had himself written a tragedy on the subject of *Medea*—without, apparently, much popular response—charges Augustus in his *Tristia* with having "with thine own eyes, which all the world follows, sitting at thine ease, looked upon the adulteries of the stage."

A Glimpse from Gibbon

Of the state of affairs at a later time, just a few years before the entry of Alaric into Rome, a characteristic passage of Gibbon demands quotation. After a vivid description of the theatre's triumphant rival, the circus, which "the Roman

people considered their home, their temple, and the seat of the republic," he writes—

But the tragic and comic Muse of the Romans, who seldom aspired beyond the imitation of Attic genius, had been almost totally silent since the fall of the republic. Their place was unworthily occupied by licentious farce, effeminate music and splendid pageantry. The pantomimes, who maintained their reputation from the age of Augustus to the sixth century, expressed without the use of words the various fables of the gods and heroes of antiquity. The perfection of their art, which sometimes disarmed the gravity of the philosopher, always excited the applause and wonder of the people.

The vast and magnificent theatres of Rome were filled by three thousand female dancers and by three thousand singers, with the masters of their respective choruses. Such was the popular favour which they enjoyed that, in a time of scarcity, when all strangers were banished from the city, the merit of contributing to the public pleasures exempted them from a law which was strictly executed against the professors of the liberal arts.

This last statement is taken from the historian, Ammianus, who

complains, with decent indignation, that the streets of Rome were filled with crowds of females, who might have given children to the state, but whose only occupation was to curl and dress their hair and gyrate and posture in the fashion of the stage.

Such was the theatre that the early Fathers of the Church inveighed against. They did so with a vehemence for which lovers of true drama cannot help confessing there was every reason. Among the most vigorous of all attacks was that of Tertullian in his *De Spectaculis*, towards the end of the second century. He did not mince matters—

Of-times the censors in the interests of morality put down the theatres, foreseeing great danger of their leading to a general profligacy. . . . Accordingly Pompey the Great, when he had erected that citadel of all impurities, superposed

on it a temple of Venus. . . . But Venus and Bacchus are close allies as the patrons of drunkenness and lust, and without doubt the performances of the theatre have the common patronage of these two deities. . . . Why is it right to look on what it is disgraceful to do? How is it that the things which defile a man in going out of his mouth are not regarded as doing so when they go in at his eyes and ears? . . . Let the Senate and all ranks blush for very shame!

The Church as Critic

Among sophisticated Romans of Tertullian's time there cannot have been much sincere belief in the supposed sanctity of Venus. His logic remains. Clement of Alexandria was equally, if not more, violent. But Christians still continued to frequent the theatre. This was happening both in Rome and in the provinces from Antioch to Orange, in the south of France, where a magnificent theatre still survives even after centuries of use as a stone-quarry. The problem of accepting actors and actresses into the Church also became acute. It was not until the Council of Arles, in 314, that the decree went forth that, by mounting the stage, actors gave their support to "the worship of false gods" and were excommunicated.

St. Augustine

Beyond question the theatre of Rome, and the example it set to the civilized world, deserved all that any of the Fathers of the Church said or did about it. The very reasonableness of their concentration on the religious aspect was to have an effect upon the theatre from which it has never completely recovered. The fault, however, was not on their side. It was on that of the Romans themselves, who kept up this pretence of religion, though many of them were quite conscious of the degradation of the stage under the auspices of gods and goddesses who had become little else but symbols of immorality. In vain they blamed the actors. St. Augustine, who had not only been a keen playgoer in his younger days at Carthage,

but had written a tragedy for which Vindecianus, the proconsul, awarded him the prize, takes a characteristically ingenious view. In his *City of God* he writes—

I will not say that the gods' mysteries are more obscene than the theatre's presentations; but this I say (and will bring history to convince all those that shall deny it) that those plays which are formed according to these poetical fictions were not exhibited by the Romans unto their gods in their solemnities through any ignorant devotion of their own, but only by reason that the gods themselves did so strictly command, yea, and even in some sort extort from them, the public presentation and dedication of those plays unto their honours. . . . It is said in their defence that these tales of their gods were not true, but merely poetic inventions. Why, this doth make it more abominable, if you respect the purity of your religion! . . . What punishment can be sufficient for those that offer their gods such foul and impious injury!

On the whole, Augustine is inclined to grant a certain status to actors. In spite of the decree of the Council of Arles, he finds genuine tragedy and comedy amongst "honest and liberal studies." On the other hand he suggests that

those wicked spirits, whom these men take to be gods, were desirous to have such beastly stories spread abroad of them (though they themselves had never acted any such thing) only to keep men's minds inveigled in such bestial opinions, as it were in snares and nets, and by that means to draw them to predestinate damnation for company.

Drama Fades Out

In these circumstances it may well have seemed, even to a comparatively sympathetic contestant like St. Augustine, that any attempt at reforming the stage on so impossible a basis as a Christian compromise with "Venus and Bacchus" would be hopeless. The only thing to do was to root the whole tradition up and start again. But nothing happens in history quite like that. In spite of all decrees and threats of excommunication, Christians continued to go to the theatre. The Emperor Constantine himself is reproached by Zosimus

for having patronized the "mimes." Leo the Great complained that the theatre in Christian Rome "attracted greater throngs than the festivals of the martyrs."

A difficulty in those troublous days must have been the lack of a ready-made drama capable of replacing the Greek and Roman classics, with their inevitable pagan associations. The result was that, a century or so after the officializing of Christianity within the Roman Empire, spoken drama simply faded out as a popular entertainment in favour of chariot races and animal fights and other excitements of the circus. One hears of sporadic efforts at tragedies on the Greek model, based upon subjects taken from the Bible. Fragments of one of these on *The Exodus*, by Ezekiel, a Jew, written at the end of the second century, have been preserved. St. Gregory Nazianzenus was credited with being the author of a still-extant verse play, *The Passion of Christ*, but his authorship is now doubted. These seem never to have achieved any popular appeal. A few "high-brows" and "blue-stockings" of the period took an academic interest in revivals of Seneca, Plautus, and Terence. But the people at large just fought and laboured, ate, drank, went to the races, with pantomimes and acrobatics to amuse the intervals, attended church festivals, and did not worry their heads any further about dramatic art.

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CHAPTER VI

THE HARVEST OF THE MIDDLE AGES

WHILST the antipathy of the Church, with other distractions, kept the Western world practically barren of dramatic effort for at least five centuries, the East was more fortunate. A date not long after the sack of Rome is now considered the most likely conjecture for the time when Kalidasa, "the Shakespeare of India" and flower of the Sanskrit drama, flourished under the favouring ægis of the Gupta Dynasty. Sir William Jones, the brilliant young Bengal judge, who first translated him into English in 1789, puts him back to "the first century before Christ," but there is still no certainty.

It is worth while recalling Sir William's description of the method of his discovery. He tells us how, in the course of legal research, he found in some so-called *Edifying Letters* the following statement—

In the north of India are many books called *Nalac*, which, as the Brahmans assert, contain a large portion of ancient history without any mixture of fable.

He searched for these in vain.

At length [he continues] a very sensible Brahman, named Radhacant, who had long been attentive to English manners, removed all my doubts, and gave me no less delight than surprise by telling me that our nation had compositions of the same sort, which were publicly represented at Calcutta in the cold season, and bore the name, as he had been informed, of plays.

Sakuntala

Thanks to that "sensible Brahman" and to Jones, who translated the Sanskrit original first into Latin and then into English, *Sakuntala*—the best as well as the most famous of Kalidasa's plays—has been familiar to us and to Europe for

nearly 150 years. It can still charm a sophisticated modern audience just as it did Goethe when he read Forster's German translation of Sir William's version. His tribute is now a classic in its own kind—

Wouldst thou the blossoms of spring as well as the fruits
of the autumn?

Wouldst thou what charms and delights? Wouldst thou
what plenteously feeds?

Wouldst thou include both heaven and earth in one
designation?

All that is needed is done, when I *Sakuntala* name.

I must confess that Goethe's references to "autumn" and "plenteous feeding" are a little recondite to me; but blessings on Sir William Jones's quest and Goethe's instant and passionate recognition! It has been my good fortune to see *Sakuntala* played in all sorts of circumstances—once in the Palm House at Kew Gardens, and once on a lovely summer afternoon in the late Lord Leverhulme's garden at Hampstead, when the bright-coloured Indian silks looked for once as they were meant to look, even beneath an English sky. It has always had a magical beauty for me, with its delicately told idyll of King Dushyanta and Sakuntala, the woodland nymph, and of how they parted and suffered, but were made happy in the end, when the ring that had got lost was found by an old fisherman. It is difficult to decide whether one should look upon this lovely play as very old or very young—perhaps that was what Goethe meant in his reference to spring and autumn—but charming it most certainly is.

"The Toy Cart"

Some modern audiences, I know, prefer King Shudraka's livelier play, *The Toy Cart*, or *The Little Clay Cart*, as Dr. Ryder of Harvard calls it in his—the best—translation. *The Toy Cart* has certainly more incident and more comedy in its story of Vasantasena, the courtesan, and her love for Charudatta, the honourable but feckless young Brahman;

of Sansthanaka, the influential villain who "still pursued her," and the gambling shampooer, and Charudatta's little son having to put up with a clay toy-cart instead of a gold one. Personally I find it a good deal more commonplace and worldly than *Sakuntala*; but, if there were any rules of drama, one of the first of them would be that every one is entitled to have his or her own preference.

Greek Influence

About all these Sanskrit plays there is the fascination of recognizing that they represent something which was not anything like new even at the time they were first presented. They have, as it happens, afforded one of those bones of contention over which scholars delight to abuse each other with a virulence as needless as it is sometimes astonishing. In this case it is the question as to whether Indian drama owes anything consciously to Greek comedy. Among the elements that have raised a suspicion of this is the jester who figures so largely in all Sanskrit plays, talking the popular Prākṛit dialect. Was he really borrowed from the guzzling, quipping, and quaffing "parasites" who are so important in Menander's comedies?

It is undoubted that after Alexander the Great's conquest of Northern India there was a considerable amount of intercourse with Greece. Quite a number of Greek ideas in astronomy and other sciences were absorbed. I myself can see nothing dreadful in the possible exchange of theatrical characters and conventions, though M. Sylvain Lévi, in *Le Théâtre Indien*, and others have looked upon the notion with a kind of horror. I have already mentioned the similarity—at any rate, in theme—of one of the old Prākṛit plays to Aeschylus's *Prometheus*. At the same time—as Dr. Berriedale Keith emphasizes in *The Sanskrit Drama* (1924)—"evidence leaves only a negative answer to the search for positive signs of influence." Nothing is against other possibilities—either of completely independent development, or of both coming from a common original, or of Greece

having been borrower rather than source. Wherever human beings have percolated, some sort of drama must have gone with them. The appropriate technique arrives, just in the same way everywhere, from the exigencies of performance. This being so, human nature may be trusted to provide very much the same types of broadly human character. As it happens, the likeness of Kalidasa's plays, in particular, to Shakespearian romance, which we know owed nothing to them, is far greater than to the Greek comedy—jester and all.

Links with Shakespeare

One very notable link with Shakespeare is that the Sanskrit plays always have an induction, after the manner of *The Taming of the Shrew*—a little dialogue leading up to the performance. This was in addition to the religious dedication—well-preserved remnant of an earlier ceremonious source. It was the dialogue between the manager and an actress in front of *Sakuntala* that inspired Goethe with his theatre-prologue to *Faust*. We must not forget, too, that the Sanskrit drama was never shown in a real theatre, but in a hall of the palace—as was the play in *Hamlet*, and the “tragical mirth” of *Pyramus and Thisbe*, presented before Duke Theseus in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, not to mention Shakespeare's own plays at Whitehall and the Inns of Court. *Sakuntala* and its companions were thus the first court-dramas to achieve immortality. Another heralding of Shakespeare and the modern drama in the Sanskrit plays is that they are partly in verse and partly in prose, and also that the heroic and high-caste characters talk Sanskrit, corresponding to our obsolete poetic and ecclesiastical English, and the others Prākṛit, or dialect.

Optimism

A quality that Sanskrit drama does not share with that of the West, either before or after, is its optimism. This is

pleasantly put by Dr. Arthur A. Macdonell in his *History of Sanskrit Literature*—

The Sanskrit drama is a mixed composition, in which joy is mingled with sorrow. The jester usually plays a prominent part, while the hero and heroine are often in the depths of despair. But it never has a sad ending. The emotions of terror, grief, or pity, with which the audience are inspired, are therefore always tranquillized by the happy termination of the story.

Nor may any deeply tragic incident take place in the course of the play; for death is never allowed to be represented on the stage. Indeed, nothing considered indecorous, whether of a serious or comic character, is allowed to be enacted in the sight or hearing of the spectators, such as the utterance of a curse, degradation, banishment, national calamity, biting, scratching, kissing, eating or sleeping.

In comparison with the Greek and the modern drama [he adds] Nature occupies a much more important place in Sanskrit plays. The characters are surrounded by Nature, with which they are in constant communion. The mango and other trees, creepers, lotuses, and pale-red trumpet-flowers, gazelles, flamingoes, bright-hued parrots, and Indian cuckoos, in the midst of which they move, are often addressed by them, and form an essential part of their lives. Hence the influence of Nature on the minds of lovers is much dwelt on.

Beneath all the comedy and prettiness and fairy-tale touches of these Sanskrit plays, it is to be remembered that there is a moral purpose of purification by suffering, just as in the sterner tragedy of Greece. In ancient India this belief was put into social practice. Every youth, no matter how well-to-do, went through a period of forced privation, coupled with study—a method of combined moral and intellectual training which might have its modern value.

Chinese Drama

Elsewhere in the East, too, drama was showing intellectual and spiritual vigour before the same could be said of anything that was happening to a large extent west of the

Bosphorus. As early as the eighth century the Chinese Emperor, Ming Huang of the T'ang Dynasty, established, in old Nanking, the College of the Pear Garden, for the training of three hundred young people of both sexes in the arts of the theatre. Music predominated—Ming Huang being so inclined; but some, at least, of the "youths of the Pear Garden" were genuine actors. This is even now sufficiently embedded in Chinese tradition as to make the "Pear Garden" still the sign and emblem of the theatrical profession.

The real makers of the Chinese drama were, of course, the Mongol emperors of the thirteenth century. We can do more, perhaps, than guess what sort of drama went forward in that "stately pleasure dome" which Kubla Khan "decreed" in his new capital of Peking. In our day, it may be true, Chinese drama had, even before the arrival of modern substitutes, dwindled into a medley of fragmentary playlets, given in non-stop fashion, and mistaken by non-Chinese visitors for a complete play. But many of these represent the relics of fine and beautiful old plays as old as the Mongol Dynasty itself.

"Lady Precious Stream"

In *Lady Precious Stream*, that delicious little "Chinoiserie" which ran for two years in London, we have, on the confession of its author, Mr. S. I. Hsiung, an example of this. The play is, he says, an adaptation of an immemorially popular theme, of which each company that performs it in China has its own variant—like *Faust* or *Cinderella* with us. Here are some further explanations of Mr. Hsiung's own—

A stage-performance in China [he writes] is longer than one here. It begins at six or seven in the evening, and ends about midnight. But it is what we call here a "selection-programme" of eight or nine acts from an equal number of different plays. As no drop-curtain is used, a Western visitor is liable to mistake the acting as of one continuous play.

Though the second act of the play *Lady Precious Stream* has

moved thousands to tears, and the third and fourth have delighted millions, these acts were as a rule performed separately and rarely produced as a whole play. In the unprintable slang of our green-room, we call this play, *The Eight Acts about the Wang Family*. We would select any of the two scenes of the second act for a programme which we did not wish to be too hilarious, or any of the third and fourth for one that we did not wish to be too solemn.

Almost everything is contentedly "museum" about the Chinese theatre—not forgetting those now-familiar conventions, the Property Man, the orchestra on the stage, the mimic journeys and paper-snowstorms, and all the other intentional defiances of illusion. They simply mean that the Chinese stage goes back to the medieval in manner as well as matter. This appeal of quaint deficiency—exploited also in *The Yellow Jacket* and *The Circle of Chalk*—is sometimes rather a pathetic reminder that no really great Chinese drama has, in fact, been produced since that brilliant but brief outburst under the Mongol rulers.

"The Story of the Western Pavilion"

Even China's one dramatist of renown belonged to the thirteenth century. This was Wang Shih-Fu, who wrote thirteen plays, among them *The Story of the Western Pavilion*, which is still popular with the educated classes, and which Mr. Hsiung has, I believe, already adapted. "The dialogue of this play," says a Chinese critic, "deals largely with wind, flowers, snow and moonlight." This, according to Dr. H. A. Giles in his *Chinese Literature*, is "simply a euphemistic way of stating that the story is one of passion and intrigue."

As given, it does not lay a very extensive claim even to these—

A lady and her daughter [we read] are staying at a temple, where, in accordance with common custom, rooms are let by the priests to ordinary travellers or to visitors who may wish to perform devotional exercises. A young and handsome student, who also happens to be living at the temple, is lucky

enough to succeed in saving the two ladies from the clutches of brigands, for which service he has previously been promised the hand of the daughter in marriage. The mother, however, soon repents of her engagement, and the scholar is left disconsolate. At this juncture the lady's-maid of the daughter manages by a series of skilful manoeuvres to bring the story to a happy issue.

Frankly, if it were not for the reference to "priest" and "temple," the whole thing might be the plot of a rather commonplace musical comedy rather than one of the few dramatic masterpieces over which Kubla Khan's immediate successors and a present-day audience have shared approval! But Mr. Hsiung's adaptation, when it is produced, may reveal unforetold wonders.

One cause, possibly, of the comparative stagnation of Chinese drama since those far-off times is that, ever since Confucius, drama, like literary fiction, has been looked upon askance officially and socially. No priesthood has watched over its early growth or given it a bondage to escape from. Moreover, the difficulty of dramatizing a national spirit in China—and we have seen how important this is—is shown in the fact that "the best troupes of actors not only come from Peking, but perform in their own dialect, which in many parts of China is practically unintelligible."

Japanese Nô Plays

It has been different with Japan, which owes its first dramatic inspiration undoubtedly to China, but has cultivated it to far better purpose, alike from a national and from a technical point of view. This is betrayed both in the Nô plays—that is to say, "plays of accomplishment"—and in the more varied and popular Kabuki. The beginnings of Nô go back almost to the introduction of Buddhism into Japan in the sixth century. Before the end of the fourteenth, it had evolved four types of drama and found in Seami a master-creator.

The art of illusion [writes Mr. Ezra Pound in the study

of "Noh" made by himself and Ernest Fenollosa] is at the root of the Noh. These plays, or eclogues, were made only for the few; for the nobles; for those trained to catch the allusion. In the Noh we find an art built upon the god-dance, or upon some local legend of spiritual apparition, or, later, on gestes of war and feats of history; an art of splendid posture, of dancing and chanting, and of acting that is not mimetic.

One can only trace out the words of the text and say that they are spoken, or half-sung and chanted, to a fitting and traditional accompaniment of movement and colour, and that they are themselves half-shadows. Yet despite the difficulties of presentation, I find these words very wonderful. They become intelligible if, as a friend says, "you read them all the time as though you were listening to music."

Nature-sense

What Mr. Ezra Pound means may be gathered from just a few lines in one of his own adaptations—that of a short play called *Kinuta*. This proved even in an English company's performance, as I can vouch, worthy of his praise. The story is as utterly simple as was the setting—just a wife who has been waiting three years for her husband. Then she dies and her ghost takes her place—

Sorrow is in the twigs of the duck's nest
And in the pillow of the fishes . . .
The voice of the pine-trees now falling
Shall make talk in the night . . .
We cannot see the tip of the branch.
The last leaf falls without witness.
There is an awe in the shadow,
And even the moon is quiet.

This exquisite Nature-sense is, of course, by no means the only credential of the Nô to a preservation likely to be more and more difficult now that the modern "problem play" and modern conventions of the stage are making inroads into the traditions of the Japanese theatre. The heroic type of Nô is a good deal more akin to our own Elizabethan drama. Among such is the famous story of the vengeance of

The Forty-seven Ronin—adapted by Mr. John Masefield in *The Faithful*. This is represented both in Nô and on the less-exacting Kabuki stage.

“Hagoromo”

In my own experience of such Chinese and Japanese players as have appeared in London during my forty years, I have found their acting nearly always disappointing in an English theatre, the movement hampered by the dress, the features not sufficiently expressive, and marred by the practice of squinting at moments of intensity. On the other hand, it is quite evident that the element of dance in the Nô can be, in a proper environment, no less spiritually moving than the words. This must be so, for example, in *Hagoromo*, a Nô by Seami, telling of a fisherman who finds an angel's feathered robe hanging upon a pine by the sea, and refuses to restore it until she dances—

No rendering [writes Mr. Frank Alanson Lombard in *The Japanese Drama*], not even the libretto in Japanese, can awaken in those who have not seen and learned to love it any conception of its beauty, which is primarily the beauty of a dance so delicate, so refined, so almost imperceptible in motion, as to be lifted above all human passion into the cool realm of the spirit.

Roswitha, the Nun

Without any claim to a popular background, one dramatist does gleam faintly in the desert of European drama between Constantine and the Crusades. This is Roswitha, or Hrotsvith, the nun of Gandersheim, in Saxony. Her six plays, written in Latin during the tenth century in imitation of Terence, still speak to us across the ages. They tell us of a woman of genius and learning, moved by a human sympathy that makes her creations more alive to us now than many wordly-wise classics. One of my most treasured memories is a production of her *Paphnutius* by Miss Edith Craig. The story would be, in any less understanding hands, a dreadful one—of the conversion of Thais, the Egyptian

harlot, whom Paphnutius, the hermit, approached in the guise of a lover and converted.

For me, the beauty of Roswitha's original easily survives my admitted admiration for the cleverness of Anatole France's mocking treatment of part of the theme in one of his novels. The penance assigned to Thais in Roswitha's play was that she should be immured for five years in a cell built round her, so that there should be no escape, with a small opening through which food could be pushed. So far from this living death being a matter of sorrow to Thais, she is heard singing for joy as the last brick is put into its place. She lived, we are given to understand, the full five years in this seclusion, until she "being reconciled unto God by a worthy satisfaction, did, after fifteen days, from the completion of her penance, fall asleep in Christ." Paphnutius himself is present at this final scene. He brings the curtain down with a very beautiful prayer, holding forth a prospect of Thais "sharing in celestial joys" and being "set among the snow-white sheep and led into the bliss of eternity."

The real interest of it all—an interest that Anatole France misses—is the character and purpose of Roswitha herself. Her abilities must have been as remarkable as her sympathies. She had already written an epic in rhymed hexameters on the Emperor Otto I. She was skilled in music, geometry, astronomy, and other sciences. She was familiar not only with Terence, but with Ovid, Plautus, Horace, and Virgil. But of more appeal than her learning is the note of a sincere but spiritualized passion and broad humanity. It is different from anything that had appeared in drama yet or was to appear for a very long while. What a change from the Early Fathers, and their virulent and so often blundering anathemas!

Terence for Christians

She herself tells us, with characteristic modesty and sense, how and why she came to write these plays. The translation is Dr. H. J. W. Tillyard's.

Many Catholics are found doing that which we cannot wholly disavow for ourselves, namely, to prefer, by reason of the eloquence of more cultured speech, the vanity of heathen books to the profit of Holy Scripture. There are others, moreover, who, while they cleave to the sacred page and shun the other writings of the Gentiles, yet read too often the inventions of Terence, and, while they are delighted by the sweetness of his diction, are defiled by acquaintance with unholy things. Hence I, the Loud Cry [a translation of her name] of Gandersheim, have not refused to imitate his manner of speaking, while others do esteem and read him; for I would that, in the same manner of writing, wherein the shameful abominations of wanton women were related, there should now be celebrated, as far as my poor talents permit, the praiseworthy chastity of holy virgins.

But often was I put to shame and blushed sorely, because, being constrained by the manner of my writing, I pondered in my mind and spake and wrote with my pen of the hateful madness of unlawful lovers and their wickedly sweet discourse, even such things as may not be heard amongst us. But if, for very shame, I had passed by these matters, I should neither have carried out my undertaking nor should I so well have set forth, so far as my powers allowed, the praise of the innocent, because as the blandishments of foolish men are more apt to entice, so much the more glorious are the renown of the heavenly Helper and the triumph of the victors proved to be, especially when the weakness of woman wins the day and the strength of man is put to shame.

“Abraham”

The other plays of Roswitha are not to me so deeply impressive. Her *Abraham* tells, like Paphnutius, of the conversion of a wanton, Mary, by her uncle, who in the same way approaches her as a prospective lover in a house of ill fame. This was to be echoed eight centuries afterwards in a comedy by another woman-dramatist, Mrs. Inchbald. In it the relationship was of father and daughter and the scene the London of the eighteenth century; but to that I may refer later on. Like Mrs. Browning, Roswitha did not shine

in humour—that is to say if this was intended in *Dulcitius*. He was the Prefect of Thessalonica, who had three holy virgins imprisoned in a scullery, but on approaching them in the night embraced pots and pans in their stead, until “his face and raiment were defiled with horrible blackness.”

It is worth noticing that Roswitha speaks of the popularity of reading Terence as an author. She says nothing about any performances of his plays. Of course, as a nun she would not be allowed to visit a theatre, and of her earlier days in the outer world nothing is revealed; though it is clear from her dedications that she entered the convent quite young. One, at any rate, of her plays—*Gallicanus*, telling of the Emperor Constantine's daughter, Constantia, and offering good opportunities for pageantry—was presented many years after as a miracle-play. There is no record of the others having been set upon the stage anywhere until modern times. Whatever their purpose or immediate achievement, Roswitha's plays remain not only an enlightening example of feminine culture, they are a personal signal of a life lived obscurely and quietly, but none the less fruitfully, at a time when European history tells mostly of destruction, arrogance, and strife.

Atellane Farces

Meanwhile, it is time we came back to the one form of dramatic art which is claimed to have bridged the gulf between classic and modern—the rough-and-tumble farce of the common folk. The open-air drama of the market place has never ceased—at any rate in countries where the climate and conditions made it possible. Nearly always, sooner or later, some element of creative genius is found in these that justifies the promotion of strolling “rogues and vagabonds” to more distinguished and permanent surroundings. It happened, in Attica, as we have already seen, when

Thespis, the first professor of our art,
To drive a trade sold ballads from a cart.

It happened in England, with the passing of drama from the inn-yard to the palace within a life-time. It happens still in the choice of kerb-side troupes and concert-parties from the sands for "National" broadcasts and long-run West End performances. It happened also, quite naturally, with the Atellane farces, brought to Rome from the little Campanian town which gave them their name. They were popular for centuries with the Roman public. They probably inspired Plautus. They were certainly demanded three hundred years later by no less critical an impresario than Petronius, the Emperor Nero's "arbiter of elegancies."

Rustic Clowns

The exact details of the performance have to be imagined; but we do know that the Atellanes were originally just the mummeries of a crowd of rustic clowns. We know that they came into the theatre during the intervals of the larger spectacle. They danced, sang, made coarse jokes and obscene gestures, indulged in rough playlets on a platform specially set up in front of the stage, and finished their interlude by passing round the hat. They were, in fact, a kind of permitted version of our "buskers" of the theatre queue and public-house door. Their art was undoubtedly sufficiently rough-and-ready for Horace to suggest that a "satyric drama," like those of the Athens where he spent his youth, should take its place.

We know, too, that the leading character of the Atellanes was Maccus, representing a thoroughly and cheerily depraved peasant, with huge head, hooked nose, and double hump. In him there is no possible reason why we should not recognize a prototype of the future Neapolitan Pulcinella, or "Little Cock," whose "coxcomb" was to descend to the medieval jesters. He may, in spite of doubters, be the forefather of our own Mr. Punch.

Then came Pappus—perhaps just an early and rude version of the old pantaloon who was to flourish in Venice long afterwards. With them were the Stupidus, or clown,

the infamous Parasite, and the gobbling Bucco. All these and the other Sanniones, or "zanies," were mere buffoons to start with. As time went on they must have evolved some sort of traditional repertory of farce attractive for a jaded audience.

Commedia dell' Arte

So, it used to be considered, started the *Commedia dell' Arte*—the famous Italian "professional comedy" which was to come to flower so remarkably in the sixteenth century and to remain even then in full favour with all classes for two hundred years, lingering still in our "Punch and Judy" show and what is left of the pantomime-harlequinade. It was to bring to the stage an almost inexhaustible wealth besides of dramatic material.

In the meantime we are to suppose it taking to itself characters from all over Italy—among them the dirty and humbugging Doctor of Bologna, father of all stage-pedants. The braggadocio, to emerge as Pistol and the "Spanish Captain," had, like the Parasite, already made his appearance in Menander, from whom Plautus could have borrowed him direct.

Far from least we were ultimately to greet Harlequin and Brighella. They are both supposed to have sprung into being in Bergamo, though they also can be traced to Greek comedy. Indeed, the sooted face which was in early days characteristic of Harlequin, and was afterwards represented by a mask, may betoken a previous Oriental or African origin. To them, and to Pierrot and Columbine and others of the "immortal family," we must return in due course.

Challenge to Continuity

It is only right to say that this idea of the *Commedia* having had a continuous life from the Atellanes of the Roman theatre is very much discredited in some quarters. For example, Dr. Winifred Smith in her *Commedia dell' Arte* writes—

The theory concerning the derivation of the Italian masked

plays from the Atellanae took its rise from among the classicists of the Renaissance, admirers of antiquity so enthusiastic that they traced every element in their own experience back to a Latin prototype. . . . The facts disinterestedly probed seem to be pitifully meagre. The fancy pictures of Maccus, drawn so sharply from the ancient statuette, and of Pappus, Bucco and Dorsennus . . . disappear in the haze of uncertainty which surrounds the names themselves. Was Maccus . . . a type-character taking the chief rôle in a little drama, or was he not more probably a favourite actor or reciter, who satirized well-known individuals or some unpopular class of society? Were the Atellanae farces or were they realistic dialogues and monologues?

What part, if any, did masks, improvisation and gymnastic feats play in the mimes? No example of an "Atellane farce" has lived to answer these questions definitely. . . . The weight of impartial opinion now inclines to regard the Mimes not as farcical intrigues but as dramatic character-satire. For that reason, if for no other, they were widely different from their supposed offspring.

Neither is it possible to trace the Masks, as some have endeavoured, to certain dramatic figures in the Mystery plays, for instance to the boasting captain, the pedantic or magician-like astrologer with his Latin lingo, and the clownish devil and his imps. These personages may offer some analogy to those of later Renaissance comedy, but merely because they represent quite universal kinds of people—the soldier, the old scholar, the rustic, and fools and knaves of various stripes. . . . Instead of ancestor-hunting in Imperial Rome or in the Middle Ages, the *Commedia dell'Arte* might better try to account for itself by looking about in the sixteenth century where it first comes into consciousness.

Pontius Pilate

Here again we have the old trouble of authorities being so intent upon disproving and arguing against each other that they cannot see the possibility of both themselves and their opponents being right. There is nothing really unbelievable in Maccus and Pulcinella being not only related to each other but also confused, in course of time, with Pontius

Pilate as represented in the puppetried miracle play. The Maccus statuette to which Dr. Winifred Smith so scornfully refers was discovered at Herculaneum in 1727. It undoubtedly bears a striking likeness to our friend of the street corner; and far worse jumbles have happened in stage tradition than that of Pontius with Pulcinella. Sir Edmund Chambers in his *Mediaeval Stage* supports the idea of Punch coming from the Atellane farces; but he will have none of Pontius Pilate. He writes—

All other puppet shows have been outdone by the unique vogue of "Punch and Judy." The derivation of these personages from the Pontius Pilate and Judas Iscariot of the miracle plays is the merest philological whimsy. Punch is, doubtless, the Pulcinella who makes his appearance about 1600 as a stock figure in the impromptu comedy of Naples. Under other names his traditions may, for all one knows, go back beyond the miracle plays to the *fabulae Atellanae*. But the particular drama in which alone he now takes the stage, although certainly not a miracle play, follows closely upon the traditional lines of the moralities.

"All-permeating Greek"

For myself, I feel that it is not so much to any troupe of Campanian rustics as to the all-permeating Greek that we owe the preservation of such true comedy as existed throughout the Roman Empire, both East and West. As I have noted, several of the Atellane characters were themselves just rough transcripts from Greek comedy. A means of survival which must not be forgotten—particularly in Rome—was the habit of having entertainments of a dramatic kind at banquets—supper-cabarets, shall we call them? Here the *joculator*—we have corrupted the very word into "juggler"—anticipated the jester of the medieval court.

As yet the mark of the slave was in his character as well as on his forehead. He was the eternal knave, forerunner of Scapin and Scaramouche—cunning, resourceful, lying, thieving, but in the main looking after his master's interests

as being also his own. How often they must have despised their conquerors—those subtle Greeks, called in to relieve the long and gross orgies of the Roman feast, to fan the drunken guest, to stroke his stomach between courses, to smooth his limbs, and to sing and dance among the roses and spilled wine!

Longinus

Pleasant it is to recall that the Roman Empire did supply at least one critic after Horace who is still read and still, to some extent, worth reading. It is very much in question whether the *Treatise on the Sublime* attributed to Longinus was really written by that distinguished and adventurous Syrian-Greek philosopher of the third century. Professor W. Rhys Roberts, in his edition, inclines to a belief that it was written by some unknown and much earlier author.

One of Professor Roberts's reasons is that Longinus does not refer to anything that had happened or any one he had come across during his life. In spite of this I should be sorry to give up Longinus's ostensible connexion with this much-praised work. Porphyry called him "the first of critics." There is something peculiarly attractive about his career—how he settled in Palmyra, and became the adviser-in-chief of that glamorous queen of the desert, Zenobia. Upon her defeat and capture he was ignominiously executed by the peasant-born Emperor Aurelian, who had no time for rebellious philosophers.

Even on its own account, Longinus's *On the Sublime* is all the more valuable now because it deals with a mood which appears to have gone out of fashion. Longinus's own title was "περὶ ὕψους", i.e. "about height." The first printed edition of 1554 turned this into the Latin *De Sublimitate*, which has come to have a rather different meaning, but was conveyed by Boileau into his French translation and modernly perpetuated by Edmund Burke with his *Essay on the Sublime and Beautiful*. Anyhow, the "sublime" is something which is seldom consciously cultivated at the present

day. The very word is used by young people void of understanding as a synonym for the ridiculous, its proverbial neighbour.

The "Sublime"

The fact remains that no other word will do. "Lofty" serves most purposes and is nearest the Greek, but does not convey the exact impression. However much those who cannot achieve the "sublime" may scoff, there is no mistaking the genuine thing when we find it, and we all know and resent the false. Possibly one reason for the difficulty of translation is that real "sublimity" is so valuable and rare a quality, and imposture so frequent, that whenever an English word is chosen it gets an ironic sense into it.

The treatise is concerned primarily not with drama, but with all forms of "poetic" art—drama included. Its original intention seems to have been just a few friendly hints on the cultivation of a dignified style. One of the delightful things about it is that Longinus was the first critic to try to be helpful with sympathetic analysis as being himself a sensitive artist, instead of laying down cast-iron rules. His assertions are ideas. If only some dramatists who have laboured in what they imagine to be the high poetic vein had understood him better we might have been spared many tedious moments.

As he himself very rightly says, the sublime is nothing else but the echo of a "great soul" in speech. Unless the "great soul" is there, it is no use making the attempt. But granted the "great soul"—and generally the "great soul" is inarticulate—how can art and criticism help in getting it expressed?

Sincerity

In the main the whole thing is a paradox. All pompousness and tumidity is to be avoided—pure sincerity is the first essential. It has been suggested, for several reasons, that the author of *On the Sublime* was at any rate acquainted with

Christianity. Here, certainly, is the very message of the Sermon on the Mount in criticism—

It is with the sublime as with the common life of man. In life nothing can be considered great which it is held great to despise. For instance, riches, honours, distinctions, sovereignties, and all other things which possess in abundance the external trappings of the stage, will not seem to a man of sense to be supreme blessings, since the very contempt of them is reckoned good in no small degree, and in any case those who could have them, but are high-souled enough to disdain them, are more admired than those who have them.

So also in the case of sublimity in poems and prose writings, we must consider whether some supposed examples have not simply the appearance of elevation with many idle accretions, so that when analysed they are found to be mere vanity—objects which a noble nature will rather despise than admire.

Absolute sincerity is, Longinus suggests, the only guard against the ever-lurking assault of a sense of humour. It was, he notes, by this sincerity of love that Sappho reached the sublime in the celebrated Ode to Anactoria, the preservation of which we owe to him. In this she “summons, as though they were all alien from herself and dispersed, soul, body, ears, eyes, tongue, colour.” On the other hand, he shows how, by lack of it, Aratus fails in the description of a storm at sea in which “a slender plank averteth death.” He has, says Longinus, “made it trivial and neat instead of terrible. Furthermore, he has put bounds to the danger by saying a plank keeps off death. After all, it *does* keep it off.”

Triviality

While avoiding all false “amplification,” one should, according to Longinus, avoid also meanness and triviality. These cannot rightly convey the kind of passion which, as we should say, “sweeps an audience off its feet.” Though concentration is and should be natural to highly emotional creation, the great soul is not niggardly in its phrases. It needs an ample rhythm. “Those words are destitute of

sublimity which lie too close together and are cut up into short and tiny syllables." What he calls "puerility"—that is to say, pedantic imitation of masters and an assumption of a learned manner—is another thing that Longinus cannot abide.

In these last matters it seems to me that Longinus might well be studied more by some of our younger poets of the stage. They aim at realism, but their pronounced aiming betrays too often that they are not, even imaginatively, in the midst of it. The results have sometimes the crudity of a catalogue. At the same time we do now and then meet with an assumption of intellectual superiority, revealing itself in academic phrases.

"Agamemnon" Up To Date

To take a consciously modern instance, here are a few lines from Mr. Louis MacNeice's in some ways brilliant translation of Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*, presented by the Group Theatre in "expressionistic" fashion, with a chorus in dinner-jackets and so on. Cassandra is telling the Chorus of Clytemnestra's unseen murder of Agamemnon—

Cassandra: Great crime . . . within here . . . planning
Unendurable to his folk, impossible
Ever to be cured. For help
Stands far distant.

Chorus: This reference I cannot catch. But the children I
recognized; that refrain is hackneyed . . .

Cassandra: Quick! Be on your guard! The bull—
Keep him clear of the cow.
Caught with a trick, the black horn's point,
She strikes. He falls; lies in the water.
Murder; a trick in a bath. I tell what I see.

Chorus: I would not claim to be expert in oracles,
But these, as I deduce, portend disaster.

If this is a fair example of the modern style in tragedy—and in a measure it is so—I am afraid Longinus would say that it was only the trivial falling back into the arms of the

puerile. Happily the sublime is not altogether gone. There are some undoubted sublimities in Mr. T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*—much more so in the simpler things, like Becket's Christmas sermon, than in the strained biological allusions of the "scrubbers and sweepers."

Even Shaw—for all his evasiveness—is by no means a stranger to the sublime. Cleopatra's address to the winds of the desert; Lilith in *Back to Methuselah*; Dubetat's creed in *The Doctor's Dilemma*; Father Keegan's vision of Ireland in *John Bull's Other Island*; Lavinia's talk to the Captain in *Androcles and the Lion*—these and many other memories there are of a "great soul" speaking through every sort of mocking inhibition.

Servile Conditions

In one remarkable passage Longinus puts down the comparative lack of the sublime in his day to servile conditions. He does so—possibly, as Gibbon suggests, out of caution—in a supposed quotation from "a certain philosopher"—

In the same manner [we read] as some children always remain pygmies, whose infant limbs have been too closely confined, thus our tender minds, fettered by the prejudices and habits of servitude, are unable to expand themselves or to attain that well-proportioned greatness which we admire in the ancients, who, living under a popular government, wrote with the same freedom as they acted.

It is true that Longinus, as Gibbon puts it, "makes a show of refuting" this. He says that—

it is, perhaps, better for men like ourselves to be ruled than free, since our appetites, if let loose without restraint upon our neighbours, like beasts from a cage, would set the world on fire with deeds of evil.

The answer is, of course, that what Longinus pictures was exactly what was happening with the degenerate ruling class of the period, whom he himself describes as "slaves of pleasure." But that was, doubtless, just Longinus's way of getting us to understand what he dared not say. If he could

live now, it might be worth while to have his view upon the difference—not so great as is sometimes supposed—between the modern slave of industry and the slaves of conquest as he knew them. In many matters the slave of conquest had a better prospect than the “robot” of the present day.

“Everyman”

Of all the plays which the Middle Ages have given us there is one which combines in an almost miraculous degree exactly the qualities that Longinus demands in the sublime—simplicity, dignity, and sincerity of manner and matter without any sort of alloy. I mean, of course, *Everyman*—that tragic masterpiece, “purging the soul” as surely as any of Aristotle’s favourites, and yet utterly without pomp or pretentiousness, and spoken in language to be understood equally by prince and by pauper.

In form it is just a “morality,” of the kind popular in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, personifying abstractions and pointing a moral of penance that is an obvious piece of clerical propaganda. But it breaks through all the trammels of its class with a quality of dramatic creation which marks out its unknown author as a man of genius as well as of passionate and personal conviction. It was not printed until 1529, the year in which Sir Thomas More became Henry VIII’s Chancellor, and no one knows whether the English or later-published Dutch version was made first. But both go back to the parable of three friends in *Barlaam and Jehoshaphat*, written by the Patriarch of Antioch over four centuries before. This in its turn is from a Buddhist source.

So *Everyman*, coming to us from East and West, is essentially part of the harvest of the Middle Ages. Its merits are very beautifully summed up by the late Sir Adolphus Ward in his *English Dramatic Literature*—

Though it may not have been written with a controversial intention, it was manifestly intended to uphold much of the specific teaching of the Church of Rome on the efficiency of

works for salvation, on the mediating influence of the Blessed Virgin, on the Seven Sacraments, on the use of Confession and Penance and on the authority and dignity of the priesthood. . . . But this tendency and its effects seem incidental only, in contrast with the sustained force of the general action and the simple solemnity with which it is carried through from first to last, unmarred by a trace of frivolity or vulgarity, and yet coming straight home from *Everyman* to every man.

The whole pitiful pathos of human life and death is here, and with it the solution of the problem which—theological controversies apart—has most enduringly commended itself to mankind. What wonder that a morality which is successful in bringing these things before readers and hearers should, by a consensus of opinion to which I know of no exception, be regarded as the flower and crown of the literary species to which it belongs?

William Poel

The history of *Everyman* upon our modern stage deserves to be recalled as showing how, in face of the true “sublime,” age and language and custom and even creed have no power whatever to destroy dramatic values. I happen to have seen the old play in every form since the late William Poel’s “discovery” of it for modern purposes at the Charterhouse. It was done then in the open air, with *Everyman* going down into an actual grave. Round it sparrows hopped and twittered; but this only enhanced the stark and gripping truth of the message that, when all have gone from *Everyman*—friends, kindred, wealth, beauty, strength, and even the “Five Wittes”—Good Deeds alone can survive the last ordeal.

After that unforgettable production, the late Sir Philip Ben Greet took it over from Mr. Poel. Year after year, on both sides of the Atlantic, he presented the play with a good taste and understanding that never failed. These were more than ever in evidence on the occasion of Sir Philip’s last production, at the Westminster Theatre, when the Bishop of London, deeply stirred by the performance, came

spontaneously forward at the finish to express his gratitude. Other productions have not been so exemplary. The temptation always is to elaborate *Everyman* into a pageant, as Reinhardt did with Hofmannsthal's version at Salzburg—not to mention others in this country.

All credit is due for the best *Everyman* tradition to the creative imagination of William Poel. His original studies of the various characters set a standard to all since that has never been improved upon. The single personage of *Everyman* himself; Death, conceived in a spirit of grisly comedy, with his harsh, high-pitched, peremptory summons falling ruthlessly on *Everyman*'s ear; the clamorous jollity of Friendship and Kindred; the calm dignity of Knowledge, and the comfort of Good Deeds—all these were given by Poel—and by Greet after him—a living, individual character that nothing has yet effaced.

Minstrels

The vogue of moralities which made *Everyman* possible grew, so we are made to believe by Sir Edmund Chambers—out of allegorical scenes in the miracle plays, the study of which by critics, dramatists, and producers, has been so inspiring and fruitful during the past hundred years. How much had happened between Roswitha's timid effort at a sacred Terence in the tenth century and the outcoming of *Everyman* in its printed form in the sixteenth!

Denied a "legitimate" drama, the lay world had, for the better part of a millennium, to rely for entertainment upon minstrels of one sort or another. It is well to keep in mind that "minstrel" originally meant only a "minor servant," without any necessary connexion with music or any other art. Nor were the early minstrels, as entertainers, by any means always the equivalent of the court poets and troubadours to whom the word *romance* has accustomed us. They included hosts of tumblers, rope-walkers, conjurers, puppet-masters, animal-impersonators, and other quite uncreative performers. These corresponded, as nearly as changing time

allows, to the familiar "turns" of a modern variety programme.

Miracle Plays

To what extent did the very large profession thus created welcome the Church's return to an interest in the stage with the establishment of public miracle plays and "mysteries"? This point could be further studied with advantage, in spite of the literature which has grown up round the miracle plays themselves, of which the moralities were a late offshoot. The miracle plays seem to have emerged from their place in the liturgy to become a public and popular institution in England with the Corpus Christi processions outside the church in the fourteenth century. How they came to be transferred to the craftsmen's guilds under municipal management in towns like York and Coventry, and to semi-religious organizations like that of the Parish Clerks at Clerkenwell, has not yet been traced quite so clearly as one might wish.

All seem to be agreed that the word *mystery* has nothing to do—in England, at any rate—with the other "mystery" which implies secrecy and is from the same root as *mute* and *mum*. The "mystery" play is apparently, like *minstrel*, akin to "ministry," i.e. service. But the kind of service meant is still an affair of academic controversy. It may refer to the craft or "mystery" of the skilled workers who presented the play, or to the liturgy of the Church, from which the play originally sprang, or to the "Fraternities of Corpus Christi," who saw to payment, or, as Chambers inclines to believe, to a guild of the actors themselves.

But of any such guild we hear nothing further, save for the "royal guild of minstrels" founded by Edward IV in 1469, and the word *mystery* was in use half a century before then. On the other hand, there were earlier "courts of minstrelsy" which claimed to issue licences to all performers. It is a pity that more is not known about this first arrival of the actors as an organized profession since the

days when the Church had suppressed the theatres. Through all the time between, Sir Edmund suggests, the actors had been "absorbed into that vast body of nomad entertainers on whom so much of the gaiety of the Middle Ages depended." They had "padded the hoof along the roads in little companies of two or three, travelling from gathering to gathering, making their own welcome in castle or tavern, or, if need be, sleeping in some grange or beneath a wayside hedge in the white moonlight."

A Critic of "Mysteries "

Undoubtedly the miracle plays were largely acted by the priests themselves, as is suggested in the vivid, if unsympathetic, description found by Hone in an old black-letter volume called *The Beehive of the Romish Church*—

Christ hath not done anything in His death and Passion, but they do plaie and counterfeite the same after him, so trimlie and livelie that no plaier nor juggler is able to doe it better. Yea, do we not see likewise that upon Good Friday they haue a Crucifix, either of wood or stone, which they lay softly upon the ground, that euerie body may come creeping to it upon handes and knees, and so kisse the feet of it, as men are accustomed to doe to the Pope of Rome?

And then they put Him in a grave, till Easter at which time they take Him up again, and sing *Resurrexit, non est hic, Alleluia*. . . . Then again upon Whitsunday they begin to play a new Enterlude, for then they send down a Dove out of an Owle's nest, devised in the roof of the church; but first they cast out rosin and gun-powder, with wilde fire, to make the children afraid, and that must needs be the Holy Ghost, which commeth with thunder and lightning. . . .

In summe, a man doeth often spende a pennie or two to see a play of Robin Hood, or a Morris dance, which were a great deal better bestowed upon these apish toyes of these good Priests, which counterfeite all these matters so handsomely, that it will do a man as much good to see them as in frostie weather to go naked. I speake not of their perambulations, processions, and going about the town, carrying their crucifixes along the streets, and there play and counterfeite

the whole Passion, so trimlie with all the Seven Sorrows of Our Lady as though it had been nothing else but a simple and plain Enterlude.

Wycliffite Defence

Needless to say, there were two sides to this as to every question. This is recognized by the Wycliffite author of a fourteenth century sermon quoted in Wright and Halliwell's *Reliquiae Antiquae*. He writes—

Summe recreatioun men moten han, and bettere it is, or lesse yuele, that thei han theyre recreatioun by pleyinge of myraclis than by pleyinge of other japis. Also, sithen it is leueful to han the myraclis of God peynted, why is it not as well leueful to han the myraclis of God played, sythen men mowen bettere reden the wille of God and his mervelous werkis in the pleyinge of hem than in the peyntinge, and bettere thei ben holden in mennus mynde and oftere rehersed by the pleyinge of hem than by the peyntinge, for this is a deed bok, the tother a quck.

With or without opposition the miracle play became in the end a thoroughly official affair. The Corporation of York issued a proclamation for the control of street traffic during the performances at each "station" round the town at which the pageant-cars, drawn by horses, stopped in turn. Here is Archdeacon Rogers's description of the Whitsun plays at Chester in 1594—

Every company had his pagiant or parte, which pagiants weare a high scaffold with two rowmes, a higher and a lower, upon four wheels. In the lower they appparelled themselves, and in the high rowme they played, being all open on the tope, that all behoulders might heare and see them. The places where they played them was in every streete. They begane first at the abaye gates, and when the first pagiante was played it was wheeled to the Highe Crosse before the Mayor, and so to every streete. So every streets had a pagiant playing before them at one time.

It is a far cry from the derided simplicities of *The Beehive*

to these elaborate spectacles of York and Coventry and Chester. Sometimes the pageant-cars were three-decked, with a lower floor for hell-fire and an upper for God and the angels. According to a proclamation in the municipal records of York for 1476, four of the "most connyng, discrete and able players within this city" were called before the Mayor to—

serche, here and examen all the plaiers and plaies and pagentes. And all such as they shall find sufficient in personne and connyng, to the honour of the citie, and worship of the saide craftes for to admitte and able; and all other insufficient personnes, either in connyng, voice or personne to discharge, ammove and avoide.

Professionals

All this prompts a certain curiosity as to the arrival of the professional actor, and how far it caused, or was caused by, the transfer of management from the church to the town. It would be well to know, too, if it happened before or after, or coincided with, the use of the pageant-car. We know that the performers were paid. A Coventry record sets down 3s. 4d. to the impersonator of God, who had to gild his face, and 8d. to a sort of utility man, Fawston by name. His fee included 4d. for "hangying Judas" and 4d. more for "coc croyng." According to Chambers, "there is nothing to show that the performers were drawn from the minstrel class; they were probably members of the guilds undertaking the plays." This compares rather confusingly with Sir Edmund's reference to the derivation of "mystery" a few pages before, as "denoting the 'function' of the guild of actors." If there were no actors there could hardly be a guild, and still less would the plays be named after it.

Altogether it is clear that much critical research might yet be done on this question of the reappearance of the professional actor. Very many things go to hint at a certain continuity right through the Middle Ages. We know that Shakespeare may have seen the actual Coventry play, as it

continued to be performed till 1580, when he was sixteen, and Stratford on Avon is only a few miles away. We know also that the miracle play traditions were part of the lore of the professional stage of his day—for example, Hamlet's allusion to "o'er-doing Termagant" and "out-Heroding Herod." At the same time, the repertory of the "comedians of the city" who arrived at Elsinore included Plautus and Seneca, and an extremely enlightening list of tragical-pastoral-comical productions, "with scene indivisible and poem unlimited."

"A Strolling Company"

A prologue-announcement of a performance "on Sunday next, at six of the belle, . . . in N—— towne" convinces Dr. Alfred Pollard, according to his *English Miracle Plays*, that the comparatively late Coventry cycle was played by "a strolling company" from the East Midlands. It is difficult not to associate the engagement of touring professional players with secularization and with the use of the pageant-car, which looks remarkably like a conversion of the van-theatre of the wayside to more hallowed purposes. Can it be that theatrical history was repeating itself in the acquisition of these medieval Thespians? They proved of use to a religious festival very different from, but in some respects analogous to, that of Dionysus in the Athenian market-place.

"Adam and Eve"

In France and elsewhere in Europe the miracle play reached a comparatively high development much earlier than it did here. It did so, at any rate, if one may judge by the austere yet beautiful *Play of Adam and Eve* written in the twelfth century. It was acted some years ago, under the direction of M. Gustave Cohen, in modernized French at the Sorbonne and, later, on the steps of Chartres Cathedral. In this there is none of the concessions to popular tastes that characterize the English miracle plays—though Satan was probably a grotesque demon. Nor is there any of

the display of nudity which Warton claimed for the Garden of Eden in English guise. *The Play of Adam and Eve* has still much of the quality of a liturgical solemnity. M. Cohen himself says—

By its psychological subtlety and metaphysical elevation, *The Play of Adam and Eve* satisfies the critical. At the same time the despair of Adam and Eve finds its way to every heart, and brings tears to the eyes by its sincerity when acted with the requisite skill. . . . This symbolic drama—is it not still that of our human destiny, ever swinging between far-off hopes of eternity and the immediate joys of earthly life?

“Robin and Marion”

Not less valuable has been M. Cohen's production of the thirteenth-century pastoral play, *Robin and Marion*, presented in the same year, with a company of students from the Sorbonne, at University College, London. This medieval operette—one of the loveliest things imaginable—was the composition of Adam le Bossu de la Halle. It brings back to us as no modern romantic imitation could do the days of the troubadours. Childlike in its innocence, it yet reveals a more deplorable state of social affairs than *The Beggar's Opera* itself.

Marion, a shepherdess, is shown in imminent danger of being carried off from her forest-home by a violent knight, who comes riding by with a falcon at his wrist. Robin, her shepherd-swain, is completely overcome by a social inferiority-complex in facing the knight. Indeed, if it had not been for Marion's faithfulness, he would never have seen her again. But when Marion has thrown herself from the knight's horse and returned, and a wolf threatens her pet lamb, Robin drives off this new intruder unaided and without a tremor.

With the night and the big, bad wolf both disposed of, Robin and Marion and the other shepherds and shepherdesses settle down to fun and games, including country-dances, cross-questions and crooked answers, and other party-romps, finishing up in a merry jamboree with garlands for

everybody and Marion queen of the feast. I have told the story just to show how little some things—and how much others—have altered in the seven hundred years that have passed since this fragrant and rollicking old medley was first presented—probably beneath a castle wall, with bright eyes glancing from the battlements.

“The Marvellous History of St. Bernard”

A more sophisticated but none the less delightful old French play, blending chivalry with sanctity, and touching its theme with the imaginative grace of true romance, is *The Marvellous History of St. Bernard*. This was presented by Sir Barry Jackson in 1926 at the Kingsway Theatre, in English. It had been translated by himself from M. Henri Ghéon's version of a fifteenth-century manuscript—the only one in existence—belonging to the Comte de Menthon.

The play tells of St. Bernard de Menthon's early life as a young noble of the tenth century, his prospective marriage, his flight from home, and his vision of the Blessed Virgin. One of the characters is that of the medieval jester, forerunner of Feste and Touchstone and others of the “dear fools of Shakespeare.” Indeed, the whole play has a special appeal as lying between the devotional and the romantic. Thanks to Ghéon and Sir Barry, it preserves for modern playgoers the charm of both.

It is singular that Sir Walter Scott, whose interest in the life and balladry of the folk was in some circumstances hardly less strong than his love of chivalry, has little that is happy to say about medieval drama. He entirely fails to appreciate the naïve sincerity and racy humours of the English miracle plays—

The poetic value of these mysteries is never considerable. [he is content to aver] It was soon discovered that the purity of the Christian religion was inconsistent with these rude games, in which passages from Scripture were profanely and indecently mingled with human inventions of a very rude and sometimes indecorous character.

“ Interludes ”

Another kind of play—or, rather, another word for almost all kinds of play—makes its appearance with the eve of the Renaissance. This is the “interlude.” It covers almost every sort of performance—grave and gay, short and long, public and private—from Plautine farce to heavy “morality.” Even the meaning of the name is still undecided. It obviously means a “play between”; but whether it is between people or between events is a question still to be answered.

Through this very vagueness of outline the “interlude” was able to cover almost all that lay between the miracle plays and moralities and the full-fledged drama and romantic comedy of the Elizabethans. It perpetuated much, including the comic “Vice” of the “moralities,” who held to his ancient coxcomb and charter of waggers. In the main it may be taken to denote a performance given at Court, in the royal presence at Whitehall or Greenwich, or at the Inns of Court, or at college festivities at Oxford or Cambridge, or at Eton or Westminster School, as against a popular show in the street.

“ Ralph Roister Doister ”

The original production of Nicholas Udall’s adaptation of Plautus’s *Miles Gloriosus* into *Ralph Roister Doister*, the first English comedy—whether it was during his headmastership of Eton or of Westminster—was described as an “interlude.” So was *Gammer Gurton’s Needle* when it was presented before Queen Elizabeth at Christ’s College on her visit to Cambridge in 1564. Not less so had been the presentation two years before of Sackville and Norton’s *Gorboduc*, the first blank verse tragedy to be seen upon an English stage, at the Inner Temple Christmas revels.

We have to thank John Heywood, Henry VIII’s “player of the virginals,” for the gradual development of the interlude as a distinct species of light, short, professional play for festal performance—distinguished from the danced masque,

or "disguising," in which the royal personages themselves took part. Several of his interludes well repay production even now. I was present at a performance, given by Miss Ruby Ginner, of Heywood's pleasantly imaginative frolic, *A Play of the Wether*. This most happily combines the purposes of a morality and a satire, with its story of how Merry Report—the comedian or "Vice"—introduces to Jupiter all sorts of people who want different weather.

The gentleman wants dry weather for hunting, the merchant good winds for sailing, the forester, the water-miller, the wind-miller, the gentlewoman, and the laundress—they all want something different. Finally a small boy wants "plenty of snow to make my snow-balls." Jupiter settles the matter by promising to give all of them the weather they want in turn—an arrangement which would serve, now as then, to explain away the troubles of our English climate.

Modern Revivals

Apart from *Gorboduc* I happen to have seen all these interludes and comedies—not forgetting Medwall's fifteenth-century *Fulgens and Lucrez*, the earliest of them all—played, and very well played, either in London or in a provincial theatre before delighted audiences. This revival of what one may call the medieval spirit in drama is a notable sign of the dramatic life of our time. It is a case not merely of rum-maging in museums, but of entering into the very soul of the feudal world. It is having its creative influence. The miracle plays—themselves lovingly represented in church as well as in playhouses and the open air—have found intimate modern echoes in such varied forms as M. André Obey's *Noé* and Mr. Charles Clay's *Joyous Pageant of Our Lady*. *Everyman* itself has been challenged by modern spiritual allegories like *Eager Heart*. Both the pastoral and the early romantic drama have been exploited, as we have seen, with beautiful results.

As against the dead indifference of Scott and his theatrical contemporaries, one finds nowadays a revitalization of the

drama of the folk in every kind, from folk-dance to passion play. This may be partly due to a consciousness of social changes everywhere, and the threatened extinction of all sorts of beliefs and customs in a mechanical age. But it shows at the same time a desire for something that mechanism cannot give—elemental humanities with which the drama is essentially and eternally concerned. They are by no means only awakenings of the past—these revivals of old ideals, fancies, conventions. They are often inspirations for the future. To help in recognizing and furthering them is one of the genuine values of dramatic criticism, whether in theatre, library, or village hall.

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CHAPTER VII

SOME ELIZABETHAN CRITICS

AS some cicerone upon a future liner of the outer spaces might be imagined saying, when the machine suddenly melts and its passengers frizzle, "We are now approaching the sun." It is of no use to make pretences about other times and other places. Shakespeare and the Elizabethans were and are a solar system of the drama, outshining anything within telescopic vision. Though the shelves of whole libraries groan with critical works upon the Elizabethan output, we are too near to Shakespeare even now not to be dazzled. People who are quite sane about everything else just lose their heads when they come to Shakespeare. A librarian once said to me, in surveying his Shakespearian section: "Every book here has a bee in its bonnet."

He was very nearly right. For some the miracle of Shakespeare can be explained only by the nonsensical process of making it a greater miracle still. So we have the "Baconians" and the "Oxfordians." Every play has inspired some wild theory. The chief reason is that, while there are all sorts of easy explanations for the form and faults and technique of Shakespeare, there is none for his creative genius. It has just to be taken for granted, like the origin of all energy. If one does this, it is astonishing how easily everything else fits in, and how little need exists for those unfortunate obsessions which have led the minds of some of our ablest scholars astray.

Romantic Drama

Supposing Shakespeare had been the normal product even of his glorious age, he would arrive just as the best exponent of the romantic drama—a natural product of the Renaissance, carrying on the tradition begun by Marlowe. A

distinguished attempt to "place" him thus was made by John Addington Symonds in his *Mermaid* essay—

Shakespeare's work can be regarded as the expansion, rectification and artistic ennoblement of the type fixed by Marlowe's epoch-making tragedies. In very little more than fifty years from the publication of *Tamburlaine*, our drama had run its course of unparalleled energy and splendour. Expanding like a many-petalled flower of marvellous complexity and varied colours, it developed to the utmost every form of which the romantic species is capable, and left to Europe a mass of work invariably vivid, though extremely unequal, over which, of course, the genius of Shakespeare rules supreme. He stands alone and has no second; but without the multifarious excellencies of Jonson, Webster, Heywood, Beaumont, Fletcher, Ford, Massinger, and a score whom it would be tedious to enumerate, the student would have to regard Shakespeare as an inexplicable prodigy.

Inexplicable Prodigy

Here we have the needless trouble of so many critics succinctly put. Their snag is the dread of permitting an "inexplicable prodigy" to exist; whereas, in our practical and still more in our spiritual lives, we accept a host of "inexplicable prodigies" quite cheerily. The simple fact is that Shakespeare lives because we love him. On the other hand, however "explicable" they may be—indeed, just because they are so—who wants to worry about the "multifarious excellences" of a score of dead names which even their champion finds "tedious to enumerate"?

In these circumstances I propose first of all to suggest something of the critical reaction to the earlier Elizabethans. Then I shall set down some critical tributes to the "inexplicable prodigy" who is, none the less, to so many of us the only one near and dear to our hearts.

The beginnings of Elizabethan criticism are, it must be confessed, not encouraging. No sooner were the elder Burbage's original Theatre and the Curtain established

“without the liberties” at Shoreditch, than criticism began. It began, where it had triumphantly and disastrously ended over a thousand years before, with the clergy. The first mention of the London theatres occurs in a sermon preached at “Pawle’s Crosse” by the Rev. T. Wilcocke on 3rd November, 1577, “in the time of the Plague”—

Looke upon the common playes in London, and see the multitude that flocketh to them and followeth them: beholde the sumptuous theatre-houses, a continual monument of London’s prodigalitie and folly. But I understande they are now forbidden because of the plague. I like the pollicie well if it holde still, for a disease is but bodged or patched up that is not cured in the cause, and the cause of plagues is sinne, if you look to it well; and the cause of sinne are playes: therefore the cause of plagues are playes.

“Beastlye Playes”

John Stockwood, schoolmaster, of Tonbridge, preaching soon after from the same pulpit, was more picturesque if not so logical—

Wyll not a fylthye playe, wyth the blast of a trumpette, sooner call thither a thousande, than an houre’s tolling of a bell bring to the sermon a hundred? . . . Why should I speak of beastlye playes, against which every man out of this place cryeth out? Have we not houses of purpose built with great charges for the maintenance of them, and that without the liberties, as who should saye, there, let them saye what they will saye, we will playe. . . . For, reckoning with the leaste, the gaine that is reaped of eighte ordinarie places in the Citie which I knowe, by playing but once a weeke (whereas many times they play twice and somtimes thrice) it amounteth to 2,000 pounds by the yeare.

This kind of thing was all the encouragement that the elder Burbage and his colleagues had towards giving the public something better than they wanted at the time when Shakespeare, as a boy of fourteen, was still “creeping like snail unwillingly to school” at Stratford on Avon.

“The School of Abuse”

In the following year, 1579, arrived the first effort at anything like intelligent dramatic criticism printed in English. This was Stephen Gosson's *The School of Abuse*. It is described on its title-page as containing a “pleasaunt invective against Poets, Pipers, Plaiers, Jesters and suchlike Caterpillars of a Commonwealth, Setting up a Flagge of Defiance to their mischievous exercise, and overthrowing their Bulwarkes, by Prophane Writers, Natural Reason, and common experience.”

Outwardly a mere reckless diatribe, this work of a young Oxonian, who had been himself an actor as well as a dramatist, some of whose plays were yet to be produced, is on a much higher plane than anything recorded from the pulpiteers. Whatever his grievance was, Gosson knew what he was talking about. He is out to entertain at all costs. Like many modern critics—known in stage-parlance as “knockers”—he imagines that the best way to achieve this is by violent attack, enriched by choice allusions, racy anecdotes, and supposedly “sensational” revelations. In a word he was a journalist of his period, not of the best type, but brilliant in his own kind.

His description of the audience, for instance, though ostensibly framed to shock the reader, is in reality a very lively and attractive piece of writing, done with evident relish and calculated, if anything, to add to the crowd whose numbers and manners it affects to deplore—

In our assemblies at playes in London, you shall see such heaving and shoving, such ytching and shouldring, to sitte by women; Such care for their garments, that they be not trode on; Such eyes to their lappes, that no chippes light in them; Such pillowes to their backes that they take no hurte; Such masking in their eares, I know not what; Such giving them pippins to pass the time; Such playing at foot Saunt without Cardes; Such ticking, such toying, such smiling, such winking, and such manning them home when the sportes are ended, that it is a right Comedie, to mark their behaviour.

“ Good playes and sweete playes ”

When it comes to the plays, the only ones that he mentions are those that he praises—one of them anticipating Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* and Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* and others of his own, about the merits of which he is at least not diffident. The yard of the old Belle Sauvage Inn on Ludgate Hill, where performances were given, is still to be traced. The Bull was in Bishopsgate Street—

The two prose bookes plaied at the Belsavage, where you shall finde never a woorde without wit, never a line without pith, never a letter placed in vaine. The *Jew* and *Ptolome*, showne at the Bull, the one representing the greedinesse of worldly chusers, and bloody mindes of Usurers: the other very lively describving how seditious estates with their own devises, false friendes, with their own swoordes, and rebellious commons with their own snares, are overthrown; neither with amorous gesture wounding the eye; nor with slovenly talk hurting the ears of chaste hearers.

The *Blacksmith's Daughter* and *Catilin's Conspiracies* usually brought in to the Theater: The first containing the trechery of the Turkes, the honourable bounty of a noble mind, and the shining of vertue in distresse. The last, because it is known to be a pig of myne own sowe, I will speake the lesse of it. . . . These playes are good playes and sweete playes, and of all playes the best playes and most to be liked, woorthy to be sounge of the Muses, or set out with the cunning of Roscius himself. . . . Now if any man aske me why myselfe have penned comedyes in time paste and inveigh so eagerly against them here, let him know I have sinned and am sorry for my own fault. Hee runs far that never turns. Better late than never. I gave myself to that exercise in hope to thrive, but I burnt one candle to seek another, and lost both my time and my travell, when I had done.

“ The Apologie for Poetry ”

While it is not without value in itself, one merit of Gosson's *Abuse* is that it drew an answer from Sir Philip Sidney, to whom it is dedicated. According to Edmund Spenser, in

“dedicating it to Maister Sidney,” Gosson was for his labour “scorned, if at least it be in the goodness of that nature to scorn.” Anyhow, Sidney took four years to think out his response in *The Apologie for Poetry*. In so far as they deal with drama, the “sacred, pen-breathing words of divine Sir Philip Sidney,” as Olney’s foreword calls them, prove singularly behind the times. He fusses about the supposed “laws” of Aristotle, unaware of the outburst of romantic genius that was soon to scatter them to the winds—

Our tragedies and comedies (not without cause cried out against) observe rules neither of honest civility nor of skilful poetry. . . . For where the stage should always represent one place, and the uttermost time presupposed in it should be, by Aristotle’s precept, and common reason, one day: there is both many days and many places inartificially imagined. You shall have Asia of the one side and Afric of the other, and so many under-kingdoms that the player, when he cometh in, must ever begin with telling where he is, or else the tale will not be conceived. Now ye shall have three ladies walk to gather flowers and then we must believe the stage to be a garden. By and by we hear news of shipwreck in the same place, and then we are to blame if we accept it not for a rock.

Upon the back of that comes out a hideous monster, with fire and smoke, and then the miserable beholders are bound to take it for a cave. In the meantime, two armies fly in, represented with four swords and bucklers, and then what hard heart will not receive it for a pitched field?

Unity of Time

Now of time [Sir Philip continues] they are much more liberal, for ordinary it is that two young princes fall in love. After many traverses she is got with child, delivered of a fair boy, he is lost, groweth a man, falls in love, and is ready to get another child, and all this in two hours’ space. How absurd it is in sense, even sense may imagine, and art hath taught and all ancient examples justified; and at this day the ordinary players in Italy will not err in. But they will say, “How shall we set forth a story which containeth many places and many

times?" Do they not know that a tragedy is tied to the laws of poetry and not of history, not bound to follow the story, but having liberty either to faine a quite new matter, or to frame the history to the most tragical conveniency? . . .

Tragi-Comedy

Besides these gross absurdities, how all their plays be neither right tragedies nor right comedies, mingling kings and clownes, not because the matter so carrieth it, but thrust in clownes by head and shoulders to play a part in majestical matters with neither decency nor discretion. So neither the admiration and commiseration, nor the right sportfulness, is by their mongrel tragi-comedy obtained. I know the ancients have one or two examples of tragi-comedies; but if we mark them well we shall find that they never, or very daintily, match hornpipes and funerals.

So it falleth out that having indeed no right comedy, in that comical part of our tragedy, we have nothing but scurrility, unworthy of any chaste eares, or some extreme show of doltishness, indeed fit to lift up a loud laughter and nothing else, where the whole tract of a comedy should be full of delight, as the tragedy should be still maintained in a well-raised admiration. But our comedians think there is no delight without laughter, which is very wrong. Laughter may come with delight, yet cometh it not of delight, as though delight should be the cause of laughter. But well may one thing breed both together. In themselves they have, as it were, a kind of contrariety. We delight in things that have a convenience to ourselves or to the general nature. Laughter almost ever cometh of things most disproportioned to ourselves and nature. Delight hath a joy in it either permanent or present. Laughter hath only a scornful tickling. . . .

The great fault even in that point of laughter, and forbidden plainly by Aristotle, is that they stir laughter in sinful things, which are rather execrable than ridiculous, or in miserable, which are rather to be pitied than scorned. For what is it to make folks gape at a wretched beggar or a beggarly clown, or, against the laws of hospitality, to jest at strangers, because they speak not English so well as we do? But I have lavished out too many words of this play matter.

Interest in the Stage

Much of this discourse might prompt in our day the exclamation: "Elementary, my dear Sidney!" But it has to be remembered that Sidney was writing of romantic drama before it had rightly begun to exist in this country. All was still crude and chaotic as against the fully formed classic models. He could not be expected to see what was coming, and he did not do so. At the same time his criticism is well worth recalling. It does not represent merely the assertion of second-hand "laws." It is an expression, to some extent, of his genuine character and of a serious interest in the stage, even if his preference was for dull echoes of Seneca or grisly themes from British mythology like *Gorboduc*.

It is clear from Gosson and the preachers that the popular theatres were at least doing varied and vigorous work in dramatic production. Tragedies and chronicle plays as well as comedies were already affording a higher alternative to bear-baiting and acrobatics; though practically all the plays that were to make the Elizabethan stage famous were yet to be written. Gosson himself declared that "*The Palace of Pleasure*, *The Golden Ass*, *The Aethiopian History*, *Amadis of France*, and *The Round Table* have been thoroughly raked to furnish the playhouses in London."

In the circumstances it means something that so elegant and gravely-disposed a courtier as Sidney should have frequented the public theatres at all at that time. If they were at all like Gosson's description of them they were hardly the place for the Earl of Leicester's idolized nephew. But Sidney's allusions to crude "clowning" and "scurrility" and "doltishness" and poverty of display hardly suggest that he confined his attentions to court or private performances. The "jewel of knighthood" was to meet his death on the battlefield at Zutphen two years later, without knowing of the glory that was to come to the theatre he had, in principle, set out to defend. Gosson, meanwhile, went into the Church. He was for twenty years rector of St. Botolph's, Bishopsgate, and died in 1624 in his seventieth year.

"Tamburlaine"

It was just a couple of years after Sidney's death that Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great* was first presented and a newly-created Elizabethan drama sprang into splendid being. It is inevitable that "Marlowe's mighty line" should stir critics to noble prose—

In the stupendous career of this Oriental conqueror [writes Dr. Frederick Boas, author of *Shakspeare and his Predecessors*, and the leading authority on Marlowe, in a particularly well-considered study] the young poet saw a subject exactly suited to his purpose. Such heroical deeds of arms fittingly set forth upon the stage would put to shame the buffooneries of the popular plays. Accordingly he threw into the creation of *Tamburlaine* the full ardent force and passion of his genius. The result was a mighty, Titanic figure, throbbing with intense vitality, a figure that by sheer masterful pressure storms its way into the imagination. It is in its highest aspects an embodiment of its author, and of the epoch which he supremely represents.

Infinitudes

A distinguishing note of the Renaissance age, intoxicated by the magnificent possibilities opened to it on every side, was an uncontrollable aspiration after the ideal, a scorn of earthly conditions, a soaring passion that sought to scale the infinitudes of power, beauty, thought and love. It is this spirit, ever one and the same, that breathes in Sir Thomas More's vision of a perfect society, in Spenser's pattern of the highest, holiest manhood, in Bacon's clarion-call to the conquest of "all knowledge," and in the heroic deeds and speeches of Sidney, Gilbert and Grenville. But nowhere does it find more characteristic vent than in Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, though it there takes chiefly, yet not solely, its least noble form—the thirst for limitless power.

"Doctor Faustus"

As a constructive dramatist Marlowe does not come off so well. Even Swinburne, in treating of *Tamburlaine*, speaks of

“the stormy monotony of Titanic truculence which blusters like a simoom through the noisy course of its ten fierce acts.” Over *Doctor Faustus* impassioned praise has to be set off even more with apology. Goethe’s curiously inappropriate exclamation, “How greatly it is all planned!” is adroitly excused by Dr. Boas, who suggests that “the play is conceived on noble lines, and the beginning and the end are worthily executed; but between them there is a yawning gap.” The late William Archer is the severest critic of Marlowe—as of the Elizabethans in general. Here is what he says of this play—

It is surely an injustice to Marlowe himself to accept *Doctor Faustus* as affording a fair measure of his philosophical or dramatic powers. To my thinking he did not seriously put forth those powers, but simply rewrote a popular German chapbook for an English popular audience. . . . The simple truth is that Marlowe had not as yet either the skill or the will to give philosophical consistency to Faustus or dramatic plausibility to Mephistophilis. He was an unskilled workman groping among the rudiments of his craft; and even if he had attained miraculous accomplishment at a single bound, it would have been totally thrown away upon a public which was only beginning its dramatic education.

Marlowe the Poet

Upon all these views it is a remarkable comment of present-day fact that Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* has been one of the big successes of the Federal Theatre in America. Possibly everybody is right. After all, Marlowe is never without his own fiercely imaginative quality—not least in the ironic agonies of *Edward II*. But in his earlier plays, at any rate, he had not learnt, or troubled about, anything that we should call comprehensive dramatic construction.

He was primarily and always a rhetorical poet, passionate infidel, and Machiavellian apostle with far too strong a character and purpose to create convincing characters detached from his own temperament. But as poet his

immortality is secure. He stood, as Chapman put it, "up to the chin in the Pierian flood," and Drayton's lines will be for ever true which tell us that

Marlowe, bathed in the Thespian springs,
Had in him those brave translunary things
That our first poets had: his raptures were
All air and fire, which made his verses clear:
For that fine madness still he did retain,
Which rightly should possess a poet's brain.

"The Spanish Tragedy"

Of Shakespeare's other predecessors not much need be said here. Their value to our living drama lies mainly in Shakespeare's debt to them, so that they are really part of his saga. We have had several productions during the past twenty years or so of Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*. It is full of interest for "museum" purposes, as presenting the germ of the play-scene in *Hamlet*, and as Kyd is still first favourite for being probable author of the original *Hamlet* play itself, gloating over revenge, which Shakespeare turned back-to-front in its appeal and made his own. Like *Hamlet*, too, *The Spanish Tragedy* follows the Seneca tradition of bringing in a ghost, dabbles in every sort of horror, and drowns the stage in blood.

Undoubtedly the play was an enormous favourite with a then comparatively untutored public, which revelled in gore. Burbage, we know, played with success as "old Hieronimo," the Spanish father who revenges the murder of his son. He arranges a play-scene, which ends in a cluster of actual stabbings, and afterwards bites out his tongue and adds his own to a heap of other corpses. It suggests by contrast what Shakespeare rose from, not what he means to us. No critic has made his fame by expressing from his innermost heart a joy in Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*. It is just a question of research and half-hearted praise, with a due assortment of "ifs" and "buts," on the part of scholars like Dr. Boas and Sir Edmund Chambers, to whose admirable works all

students may be readily referred. But it is not this kind of thing which makes dramatic criticism worth while. Dr. Boas sums him up as sympathetically as possible—

Kyd may justly claim to be the pioneer of introspective tragedy in England. Yet the moral basis of the play is crude in the extreme. A wild, insatiable fury of revenge is the sole animating impulse of all the chief personages, and suffices to condone every atrocity. . . . It holds a unique place in dramatic literature, reaching back to *Gorboduc* and forward to Shakespeare's early plays, probably even to *Hamlet* and *King Lear*.

Lyly, the Euphuist

Far more modernly sympathetic and not less important to the making of Shakespeare were the Court-pastorals of John Lyly, the author of *Euphues*. Born in 1553, and coming down from Magdalen College, Oxford, he was the eldest of the "University wits" destined to be beaten by Shakespeare at their own game. Though Shakespeare did inevitably "our Lyly outshine"—together with "sportive Kyd and Marlowe's mighty line"—the inventor of "euphuism" does not seem himself to have resented the coming of his brilliant disciple. At the same time it is difficult not to feel a certain sympathy over Robert Greene's famous allusion in his *Groatsworth of Wit, bought with over a Million of Repentance*—

There is an upstart crowe, beautified with our feathers,
that with "Tygre's heart wrapt in a player's hide" supposes
he is as well able to bombaste out a Blanke Verse as the best of
you; and, being an absolute Johannes fac-totum is, in his own
conceyt, the only Shake-scene in a country.

Poor Greene was evidently referring to Shakespeare's share in *Henry VI*—where the "tiger's-heart" line occurs—and to the young actor-playwright's easy skill in heroics. But it was the style of Lyly—the "euphuistic" elegance of the Court pastoral—that was to characterize Shakespeare's first original play, *Love's Labour's Lost*. Shakespeare's genius was to use and develop and humanize this to his own

purpose just as it was to use and develop and humanize the blank-verse "bombast."

"Campaspe"

It is possible that Lyly, just ten years Shakespeare's senior, and Greene and Peele, who were respectively four and six years older than the Warwickshire intruder, have not even now had full critical justice done them. Lyly's *Campaspe*, telling of the rivalry between Alexander the Great and the painter Apelles for the favour of Campaspe, the fair Theban, with Diogenes and other philosophers intervening, has some delightful writing in it. The "euphuistic" wit is concocted, to be sure, according to a simple Sitwellian recipe, upon which Shakespeare was to improve at every point. Alliteration, antithesis, and fantastic allusion become rather tedious as a repeated pattern. One can have too much embroidery, also, of any kind. But Queen Elizabeth may have been in leisurely mood on the New Year's night of 1584, when *Campaspe* was played at Court "by Her Majesty's children and the children of St. Paul's." Whether the more general audience at the Blackfriars theatre, where it was repeated, enjoyed it so well there is no knowing. It contains at any rate one song that has achieved something like immortality in "Cupid and my Campaspe," and hosts of happy images.

As the writer of a "best-selling" novel as well as of comedies that reached the private ear of the Queen with approval, Lyly seems to have been comparatively fortunate in his private life. He was more so, at any rate, than his fellow-Oxonian, Peele, and than Greene, who was at both Oxford and Cambridge. Though he failed to induce Queen Elizabeth to appoint him Master of the Revels, Lyly was able to join Lord Burghley's household in a more or less dignified capacity, and survived the century.

Arcades Ambo

Meanwhile, both Greene and Peele had ended lives of dissipation with early and miserable deaths. Yet there are

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CHAPTER VIII

SHAKESPEARE IN CRITICISM

NOW to the problem of suggesting within anything like reasonable limits the critical reaction to Shakespeare himself. An enormous mass of theory and analysis and the critical treatment of particular plays will have necessarily to go by the board—at any rate for the time being. I am going to take for granted that the author of the plays was William Shakespeare from Stratford on Avon, though there is no possible reason against accepting just as much external inspiration and collaboration as may seem to have been likely at the time and in the circumstances.

One pleasantly simplifying fact is that first and last the solvent of all needless discussion is the man himself—as revealed both by the plays and poems and by what is known of the life of Shakespeare. There is, at the heart of it, no difference between the opinion of his contemporaries and the latest and most enlightened criticism. When once we bring ourselves to take the technical supremacy of Shakespeare for granted and to think of him as a man, we find that it is really by his human qualities, not by the intellectual machinery of his work, that he remains unapproached in his universality of appeal to all classes of all nations who have the means of knowing him.

“Friendly Shakespeare”

We find that this was the outstanding view of those who knew him in life. Both they and the most penetrating critics since have taken, as it were, two shots at estimating Shakespeare. One is a long-distance shot. It generally results in mere dazzlement at his miraculous gift of language and its music, his skill as a dramatist, and his imaginative power as a poet and as a creator of some two thousand distinct characters. This estimate tends to get rather pompous and useless

nowadays, when Shakespeare's supremacy in each direction has for so long ceased to be news. Some who study him closer then find that it is, after all, the man who matters—the universal sympathy of one to whom friendship was the most important thing in life.

We know that a feeling of this dual aspect of Shakespeare was in evidence quite early during his career. Before either the final *Hamlet*, or *Macbeth*, or *Othello*, or *King Lear* were produced, Francis Meres was writing in his *Wit's Treasury* (1598)—

As the soule of Euphorbus was thought to live in Pythagoras; so the sweete, wittie soule of Ovid lives in mellifluous and honey-tongued Shakespeare, witness his *Venus and Adonis*, his *Lucrece*, his sugared sonnets among his private friends. . . . As Plautus and Seneca are accounted the best for Comedy and Tragedy among the Latins; so Shakespeare among the English is most excellent in both kinds for the stage.

It was an even more exalted paragon of whom Anthony Scoloker wrote in *Daiphantus* (1604)—

Like friendly Shakespeare's tragedies, where the comedian rides, while the tragedian stands on tiptoe.

The First Folio

Of the friendliness of Shakespeare what more perfect proof than the testimony of his fellow players, Heminge and Condell, editors of the First Folio?—

We have but . . . done an office to the dead, to procure his Orphanes, Guardians; without ambition either of self-profit or fame; onely to keepe the memory of so worthy a Friend and Fellow alive as was our Shakespeare . . . who, as he was a happie imitator of Nature, was a most gentle expresser of it. His mind and hand went together: And what he thought, he uttered with that easiness, that we have scarce received from him a blot in his papers.

No one, of course, combines the two views better than Ben Jonson. On the one side is the splendour of his First Folio

tribute to "the memory of my beloved, the Author, Mr. William Shakespeare"—

Soul of the Age !

The applause ! delight ! the wonder of our Stage !
 My Shakespeare, rise ; I will not lodge thee by
 Chaucer or Spenser, or bid Beaumont lye
 A little further, to make thee a roome :
 Thou art a Monument without a tombe . . .
 Triumph, my Britaine, thou hast one to showe,
 To whom all scenes of Europe homage owe.
 He was not of an age, but for all time !
 And all the Muses still were in their prime,
 When like Apollo he came forth to warme
 Our eares, or like a Mercury to charme. . . .

"This Side Idolatry"

Then, twelve years after, we find Jonson writing in his *Discoveries*—

I remember the players have often mentioned it as an honour to Shakespeare that in his writing (whatsoever he penned) he never blotted out a line. My answer hath been, "Would he had blotted out a thousand !" which they thought a malevolent speech. I had not told posterity this, but for their ignorance who chose that circumstance to commend their friend by wherein he most faulted and to justify mine own candour. For I loved the man, and do honour his memory, on this side idolatry, as much as any. He was, indeed, honest and of an open and free nature; had an excellent phantasy, brave notions and gentle expressions, wherein he flowed with that facility that sometimes it was necessary he should be stopped. . . .

His wit was in his own power; would the rule of it had been so, too ! Many times he fell into those things that could not escape laughter; as when he said, in the person of Caesar, one speaking to him, "Caesar, thou dost me wrong !" he replied "Caesar did never wrong without just cause"; and such like—which were ridiculous.

Whether or no "rare Ben" had just cause in this—the passage, as quoted, does not occur in any known edition of

the play—a sense of Shakespeare's friendliness is clear enough.

Another double view is that of Milton. On the one hand we have with the Second Folio his majestic epitaph, written in 1630, fourteen years after Shakespeare's death, and marred only by the weak tautology of "wonder and astonishment" in the seventh line—

What needs my Shakespeare for his honoured bones,
The labours of an Age in pilèd stones,
Or that his hallowed Reliques should be hid
Under a star-ypointing pyramid?
Dear Sonne of Memory, great Heire of Fame,
What needst thou such weak witness of thy Name?
Thou in our wonder and astonishment
Hast built thyselfe a lasting Monument.

But when he was off the heroic vein, in *L'Allegro* (1632), we have something far more intimate—

Or sweetest Shakespeare, fancy's child,
Warble his native wood-notes wild.

"This William . . ."

Some three years after, old Thomas Heywood, who must have been speaking from personal memory, writes in his *Hierarchie of the Blessed Angels*—

Mellifluous Shakespeare, whose enchanting quill
Commanded Mirth or Passion, was but Will.

What pleasant touches, too, are those of John Aubrey, who, though he was not born till nine years after Shakespeare had died, knew more about him than many who were his contemporaries!—

This William . . . began early to make essays at dramatic poetry, which at that time was very low; and his plays took well. He was a handsome, well-shaped man, very good company, and of a very ready and pleasant, smooth wit. . . . I have heard Sir William Davenant and Mr. Thomas Shadwell—who is accounted the best comedian we have now—say that

he had a most prodigious wit, and did admire his natural parts beyond all other dramatical writers.

With the Restoration, and right on through the eighteenth century, criticism went awry in both—if not all—directions. It exaggerated homage on the one hand to boring deification. It degraded friendliness on the other to the assumption that Shakespeare, who “breathed books” and, like the much lowlier-born Carlyle, drank in knowledge at every pore, must have been an ignorant boor, just because he was taunted by Jonson with having “small Latin and less Greek.” Hence the Baconian theory and all sorts of troubles, though Jonson’s phrase would equally apply to Shaw, Pinero, Jones, Noel Coward, H. G. Wells, St. John Ervine, and countless other brilliant people of our day.

“Glorious” John Dryden

The fashion was set by Dryden. While substituting his own wretched travesty for *The Tempest* on the assumption that Shakespeare was an inspired idiot who did not know his own job, he apologizes for his great original in specious wise—

Those who accuse him to have wanted learning, give him the greater commendation. He was naturally learned. He needed not the spectacles of books to read nature—he looked inwards and found her there. I cannot say he is everywhere alike. Were he so I should do him injury to compare him with the greatest of mankind. He is many times flat and insipid, his comic wit degenerating into clenches, his serious swelling into bombast. But he is always great when some great occasion is presented to him. No man can say he ever had a fit subject for his wit, and did not then raise himself as high above the rest of poets. . . . In him we find all arts and sciences, all moral and natural philosophy, without knowing that he ever studied them.

In prefacing his own edition of the plays, Pope carries on the baleful tradition of wondering patronage—

His sentiments are not only in general the most pertinent

and judicious on every subject, but by a talent very peculiar—something between penetration and felicity—he hits upon that particular point on which the bent of each argument turns or the force of each motive depends. This is perfectly amazing from a man of no education or experience in those great and public scenes of life, which are usually the subject of his thoughts; so that he seems to have known the world by intuition, to have looked through human nature at one glance and to be the only author that gives ground for a very new opinion, that the philosopher and even the man of the world may be born as well as the poet. It must be owned that, with all these great excellencies, he has almost as great defects; and that as he has certainly written better, so he has, perhaps, written worse, than any other.

How comes it that an editor of Shakespeare could charge the alderman's son from Stratford's quite reputable grammar school, a protégé of Southampton before all the greater plays were written, and soon, as the Lord Chamberlain's own dramatist, intimate with every detail of the life of Queen Elizabeth's Court, with being "a man of no education or experience in public scenes of life"?

The "Dauntless Child"

From this "yokel" standpoint, the most unutterable bathos ever written about Shakespeare was surely that of Gray's *Progress of Poesy*—

In thy green lap was Nature's darling laid
What time, where lucid Avon strayed,
To him the mighty mother did unveil
Her awful face; the dauntless child
Stretched forth his little hand, and smiled.
"This pencil take," she said, "whose colours clear
Richly paint the vernal year:
Thine, too, these golden keys, immortal boy!
This can unlock the gates of Joy,
Of Horror that, and thrilling Fears,
Or ope the sacred source of sympathetic Tears."

Pepys as Critic

Meanwhile irresponsible playgoers may have been pardoned for looking upon the garbled verse, mechanical toys, and wig-and-plume displays that went for Shakespeare from the Restoration onwards with a mixture of bewilderment and boredom. Even in the days of Betterton, that eager first-nighter, Samuel Pepys, has hardly a good word to say for any Shakespearian production—except *Macbeth*. This he saw in the more or less operatic version arranged by D'Avenant, with a good many of the finest lines mangled beyond recognition, and any amount of gaudy mechanical spectacle. He paid five recorded visits to this play at the Duke's, or Duke of York's, Theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields. Some of his remarks are not so trivial as others. At least we know they were genuine and were made to please nobody but himself—a kind of criticism which can be as valuable as it is rare. Here are some of his entries—

Nov. 5, 1664. To the Duke's House to see *Macbeth*, a pretty good play, but admirably acted.

Dec. 28, 1666. To the Duke's House, and there saw *Macbeth* most excellently acted, and a most excellent play for variety.

Jan. 7, 1667. To the Duke's House and saw *Macbeth*, which, though I saw it lately, yet appears a most excellent play in all respects, but especially in divertisement, though it be a deep tragedy; which is a strange perfection in a tragedy, it being most proper here, and suitable.

Oct. 16, 1667. To the Duke's House, and I was vexed to see Young, who is but a bad actor at best, act *Macbeth*, in the room of Betterton, who—poor man!—is sick.

Dec. 21. 1668. To the Duke's House, and saw *Macbeth*. The King and Queen there, and we sat just under them and my Lady Castlemaine . . . Lady Castlemaine, when she saw Moll Davis, looked like fire.

Amidst distractions of this order, and with the kind of treatment bestowed by the producers of the period, it was

hardly Shakespeare's fault that Pepys registered *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as "the most insipid, ridiculous play that ever I saw in my life." He found *Henry VIII* to be "so simple a thing, made up of a great many patches, that, besides the shews and processions in it, there is nothing in the world good or well done." He "ever heretofore esteemed *Othello* a mighty good play, but, having so lately read *The Adventures of Five Hours*, it seems a mean thing." As for *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, it "did not please me at all, in no part of it."

Dryden's "The Tempest"

He had a slightly better opinion of Dryden's and D'Avenant's debased version of *The Tempest*, which he saw on its first night and describes as "an old play of Shakespeare's"—

The house [we read] was mighty full; the King and Court there; and the most innocent play that ever I saw; and a curious piece of musick in an echo of half-sentences, the echo repeating the former half, while the man goes on with the latter; which is mighty pretty. The play has no great wit, but yet is good above ordinary plays.

Happily—thanks to Heminge and Condell, and to Nicholas Rowe and some succeeding editors—these travesties could not put out of count the real Shakespeare, submerged though he was for nearly a hundred years so far as the stage was concerned. If Quin, whose "right hand knew not what his left hand did," looked anything like his portraits as Coriolanus when he appeared in Tate's version of Shakespeare's play, one feels that the shade of Shakespeare must have been glad that his original was temporarily suspended.

"The Spectator"

Even Addison contents himself with a glimpse of Shakespeare as a kind of Puck peeping in from the moonlight upon the dreary fustian of the contemporary stage. There Addison's

own *Cato*, now laden with the dust of two centuries, was considered an exciting work. The best *The Spectator* has to say about Shakespeare is this—

There is a kind of writing, wherein the poet quite loses sight of Nature, and entertains his reader's imagination with the characters and actions of such persons as have, many of them, no existence, but what he bestows on them. This Mr. Dryden calls the "fairy way of writing" . . .

Among all the poets of this kind Shakespeare has incomparably excelled all others. That noble extravagance of fancy which he had in so great perfection, thoroughly qualified him to touch this weak, superstitious part of his reader's imagination; and made him capable of succeeding, where he had nothing to support him besides the strength of his own genius. There is something so wild and yet so solemn in the speeches of his ghosts, fairies, witches and the like imaginary persons, that we cannot forbear thinking them natural, tho' we have no rule by which to judge of them, and must confess, if there are such beings in the world, it looks highly probable that they should talk and act as he has represented them.

Voltaire's Bombshell

It was Voltaire's curiously Shavian blend of ferocious and utterly unfair attack, with a suggestion of grudging appreciation, that woke up criticism on this side of the Channel to values in Shakespeare hitherto ignored or looked upon as deficiencies. Voltaire's three years in England undoubtedly left him with a very keen and shrewd idea of what was good in the English character and constitution, and also in our national dramatist. But praise was not Voltaire's hobby, and his first interest was himself. So he cribbed everything he could for his own plays, and gave his "discovery" of Shakespeare the tang of controversy so useful for publicity purposes by mixing his assertions up with virulent abuse. This use of "punch" is an old trick of a game in which Voltaire—the inventor of the *claque*—knew every move.

Here is the celebrated bombshell in a letter prefacing his own *Semiramis*—

Hamlet is a gross and barbarous piece, and would never be borne by the lowest rabble in France or Italy. Hamlet runs mad in the second act, and his mistress in the third; the prince kills the father of his mistress and fancies he is killing a rat; and the heroine of the play throws herself into the river. They dig her grave on the stage, and the grave-diggers, holding the dead men's skulls in their hands, talk nonsense worthy of them. Hamlet answers their abominable stuff by some whimsies not less disgusting; during this time one of the actors makes the conquest of Poland. Hamlet, his mother, and father-in-law, drink together on the stage. They sing at table, quarrel, beat and kill one another.

One would think the whole piece was the product of the imagination of a drunken savage. And yet, among all these gross irregularities, which make the English theatre even at this day so absurd and barbarous, we find in *Hamlet*, which is still more strange and unaccountable, some sublime strokes worthy of the greatest genius. It seems as if nature took pleasure to unite in the head of Shakespeare all that we can imagine great and forcible, together with all that the grossest dullness could produce of everything that is most low and detestable.

Dr. Johnson Replies

This was a direct pull at the tail of the British lion, which responded with a roar from an altogether appropriate quarter. Dr. Johnson's preface to his edition of Shakespeare (1765)—though his own predilections had been hitherto all in favour of the classic unities and pompous artifice—stands out as a sturdy, if reluctant, essay in championship. It rehearses most of the things common sense could find to say on Shakespeare's behalf at that time. Johnson did not mind reproving Shakespeare as if he were a naughty child, and patronizing him extensively (particularly in his notes), but from Voltaire he will accept no ruling—

This is the praise of Shakespeare, that his drama is the mirror of life; that he who has mazed his imagination in following the phantoms which other writers raise up before him, may here be cured of his delirious ecstasies by reading human sentiments in human language, by scenes from which a

hermit may estimate the transactions of the world, and a confessor predict the progress of the passions.

His adherence to general nature has exposed him to the censure of critics, who form their judgments upon narrower principles. . . . Voltaire censures his kings as not completely royal. Dennis [this was the author of *An Essay on the Genius and Writings of Shakespeare*, 1712] is offended that Menenius, a senator of Rome, should play the buffoon; and Voltaire perhaps thinks decency violated when the Danish usurper is represented as a drunkard.

But Shakespeare always makes nature predominate over accident; and if he preserves the essential character, is not very careful of distinctions superinduced and adventitious. His story requires Romans or kings, but he thinks only on men. He knew that Rome, like every other city, had men of all dispositions; and wanting a buffoon, he went into the senate-house for that which the senate-house would certainly have afforded him. He was inclined to show an usurper and a murderer not only odious, but despicable; he therefore added drunkenness to his other qualities, knowing that kings love like other men, and that wine exerts its natural power upon kings. These are the petty cavils of petty minds; a poet overlooks the casual distinction of country and condition, as a painter, satisfied with the figure, neglects the drapery.

Laws of Necessity

One need not follow Johnson in his ponderous but effective arguments against the tyranny of the unities of time and place where romantic drama is concerned. The whole controversy is dead as a door-nail now. The wonder is that it should have raged so long, and that the supposed authority of Aristotle in "laws" which Aristotle never laid down should have definitely hindered the development of the drama in France.

Then, as now, the law of necessity was quite stringent enough. A too-frequent change of place is inadvisable still—not because it destroys illusion, but because in a scenic production it costs more, which Aristotle would have regretted, and leads to long waits or lumbering mechanics.

A single-set comedy will always have an advantage in the eyes of an economical manager. But why there should have been so much fuss about something that Aristotle did not say, and about a need for excusing the presence of a chorus that had long vanished, is one of the still-unexplained curiosities of criticism.

Certainly Johnson—against his earlier judgment—trained his gun quite formidably upon the battlements of that fortress of false tradition. His loyalty to Shakespeare is less sure. He will always pick a hole where he can. Some of his “asides” have an element of justice in them—as for instance this on Shakespearian “quibbles,” though the “euphuism” in which Shakespeare’s wit was schooled was partly to blame—

A quibble is to Shakespeare what luminous vapours are to the traveller: he follows it at all adventures; it is sure to lead him out of the way and sure to engulf him in the mire. It has some malignant power over his mind and its fascinations are irresistible.

Not a “Shakespearian”

One pronouncement of Johnson’s may be regarded as deplorable from every point of view. It is that

not one of Shakespeare’s plays, if it were now exhibited as the work of a contemporary writer, would be heard to the conclusion.

This may well have been so in Johnson’s time. The fault was simply the bad taste of the public. But with all he undoubtedly did to bring the eighteenth-century world nearer to an appreciation of Shakespeare, one cannot help feeling that Johnson was never a whole-hearted “Shakespearian”. Even his famous verse-tribute, with its laborious epigrams, is a remote, half-satirical homage—

When Learning’s triumph o’er her barbarous foes
First reared the stage, immortal Shakespeare rose.
Each change of many-coloured life he drew
Exhausted worlds and then imagined new:

Existence saw him spurn her bounded reign
And panting Time toiled after him in vain.

Goethe and Shakespeare

While Johnson's *Shakespeare* was going through its early editions, and "brave old Samuel" himself had still eight years to live, an entirely new orientation was being taken towards Shakespeare by a young man of twenty-one, who was studying law and writing poetry at Strasbourg. The young man was Goethe. No one can describe better than himself the effect Shakespeare had upon him. What a complete change is his whole attitude from the self-satisfied apologies for Shakespeare's ignorance and surprise at his knowledge which had hitherto done duty for critical communion! This was the way genius greeted genius in 1775—

Do not expect me to write much or to write sedately; tranquillity of soul is no garment for a festival; and even still I have thought little about Shakespeare; to divine him, feel him in great passages, is the highest to which I have been able to attain. The first page I read in him made me his for life, and when I had reached the end of the first play, I stood like one born blind, on whom in a moment a miraculous hand has bestowed sight. I recognized, I felt most intensely, that my being had been infinitely widened; everything was new to me, unknown, and the unwonted light gave me pain in my eyes. Gradually I learned to see, and, thanks to my receptive nature, I still feel intensely how much I have gained.

It may be admitted that Lessing deserves the credit of being Shakespeare's earliest critical sponsor in Germany. He had already shown characteristic insight and initiative in accepting Shakespeare's defiance of the unities as against the French classicists who had hitherto dominated the German stage. But Goethe's response was something quite fresh. The sense of intimacy and revelation to which he confesses was the arrival of a new understanding—a new criticism—of Shakespeare and his magic. It is the first suggestion of a true sympathy with the man revealed in the

plays. It is the first recognition that his characters are not merely reflexes either of the Elizabethan and earlier world or of our own, but an extension of both. They are creations just as real, speaking a language of musical rhythms which is their own and none other's, but beguiling us of laughter and tears as readily as if they were our close companions.

Shakespeare's Heroines

This point of view was to be very beautifully put by De Quincey in his *Biographical Essay*—

Shakespeare has extended the domains of human consciousness, and pushed its dark frontiers into regions not so much as dimly descried or even suspected before his time, far less illuminated (as now they are) by beauty and tropical luxuriance of life. For instance—a single instance, indeed, one which is in itself a world of new revelation—the possible beauty of the female character had not been seen as in a dream before Shakespeare called into perfect life the radiant shapes of Desdemona, of Imogen, of Hermione, of Perdita, of Miranda and many others. The Una of Spenser, earlier by ten years than most of these, was an idealized portrait of female innocence and virgin purity, but too shadowy for a dramatic reality. As to the Grecian classics, let not the reader imagine that any prototype in this field of Shakespearian power can be looked for there.

Schlegel's "Lectures"

After Goethe, it is to Schlegel's *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature* delivered in Vienna and translated into English in the year of Waterloo that we owe the restoring in England—quite apart from their effect in Germany—of undimmed enthusiasm for Shakespeare. Both Coleridge and Hazlitt confessedly owed their inspiration to Schlegel, whom Hazlitt quotes in full by way of preface to his own *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays*. It was Schlegel's privilege to remind Shakespeare's countrymen of their own dramatist's mastery of passion as well as of character—

This tragical Titan, who storms the heavens, and threatens

to tear the world from off its hinges; who, more terrible than Aeschylus, makes our hair stand on end, and congeals our blood with horror, possessed, at the same time, the insinuating loveliness of the sweetest poetry. He plays with love like a child, and his songs are breathed out like melting sighs. He unites in his genius the utmost elevation and the utmost depth; and the most foreign, and even apparently irreconcilable properties subsist in him peaceably together. The world of spirits and nature have laid all their treasures at his feet. In strength a demigod, in profundity of view a prophet, in all-seeing wisdom a protecting spirit of a higher order, he lowers himself to mortals, as if unconscious of his superiority, and is as open and unassuming as a child.

All this seems a little tumid for these days. But one has to remember that it coincided with Byron and the Napoleonic aftermath. Our stage—and to some extent that of Germany as well—was given over to the spectral and the sentimental. Kotzebue and “Monk” Lewis were favoured authors at our patent theatres. Mrs. Siddons was retiring and Edmund Kean making his first appearance at Drury Lane. It was a time when both critics and dramatists thought it a good thing to dip their pens in earthquake and eclipse.

Leigh Hunt

If one wants a study of Shakespeare from which the shadows are missed out altogether, one may find it very charmingly done by a critic of just the same period. Leigh Hunt had the happy faculty of forgetting all troubles—public and private—when he could gather a nosegay of fancies. Here is his view of Shakespeare expressed in *The Indicator*, 3rd May, 1820—

O thou divine human creature—greater name than even divine poet or divine philosopher—and yet thou wast all three!—a very spring and vernal abundance is to be found in thy productions! They are truly a second nature. We walk in them with whatever society we please; either with men or fair women or circling spirits, or with none but the whispering airs and leaves.

Thou makest worlds of green trees and gentle natures for us, in thy forests of Arden and thy courtly retirements of Navarre. Thou bringest us among the holiday lasses on the green sward; layest us to sleep among fairies in the bowers of midsummer; wakest us with the song of the lark and the silver-sweet voices of lovers; bringest more music to our ears both from earth and from the planets; anon settest us upon enchanted islands, where it welcomes us again, from the touching of invisible instruments; and, after all, restorest us to our still-desired haven, the arms of humanity. Whether grieving us or making us glad, thou makest us kinder and happier. The tears which thou fetchest down are like the rains of April, softening the times that come after them. Thy smiles are those of the month of love, the more blessed and universal for the tears.

This might be described as Shakespeare "up to the pretty," but it does not take into account *Titus Andronicus*, *Timon of Athens*, and *Troilus and Cressida*. It does not answer for the greater tragedies that grapple with life's agonies, explore the mad-house and the sepulchre, but still leave us with a sense of faith not lost.

Coleridge's "Method"

Neither Coleridge nor Hazlitt is quite satisfactory as a guide to Shakespeare, though they both deal at length with the structure of the plays, and Hazlitt with the acting of them as well. Both impress upon us the universality and reality of Shakespeare's characters—as, indeed, does every critic of importance. But when it comes to the man himself, Coleridge buries his head in philosophic sand, and Hazlitt leaves Schlegel to "carry on." Coleridge's very tough essay in *The Friend* on *The Principle of Method* reduces it all to a kind of natural system. What he exactly means is not too easy to discern, beyond the obvious fact that Shakespeare's characters live differently though he is behind them all and their life-blood comes from him. Coleridge says—

We find individuality everywhere; mere portrait nowhere. In all his various characters we still find ourselves communing with the same nature, which is everywhere present as the

vegetable sap in the branches, sprays, leaves, buds, blossoms and fruits, their shapes, tastes and colours. . . . We may define the excellence of their method as consisting in that just proportion, that union and interpenetration of the universal and the particular, which must ever pervade all works of decided genius and true science.

Shaw on Shakespeare

By way of contrast—and yet, in one important particular, remarkable agreement—suppose we turn direct from these strangely humourless visionaries of the Regency to a great critic-dramatist of our own time, Bernard Shaw. In his *Saturday Review* notice of the revival of *Cymbeline* at the Lyceum in 1896, Mr. Shaw wrote—

There are moments when one asks despairingly why our stage should ever have been cursed with this “immortal” pilferer of other men’s stories and ideas, with his monstrous rhetorical fustian, his unbearable platitudes, his pretentious reduction of the subtlest problems of life to commonplaces against which a Polytechnic debating-club would revolt, his incredible unsuggestiveness, his sententious combination of ready reflection with complete intellectual sterility, and his consequent incapacity for getting out of the depth of even the most ignorant audience, except when he solemnly says something so transcendently platitudinous that his more humble-minded hearers cannot bring themselves to believe that so great a man really meant to talk like their grandmothers. . . .

But I am bound to add that I pity the man who cannot enjoy Shakespeare. . . . His gift of telling a story (provided someone else told it to him first); his enormous power over language, as conspicuous in his senseless and silly abuse of it as in his miracles of expression; his humour; his sense of idiosyncratic character; and his prodigious fund of that vital energy which is, it seems, the true differentiating property behind the faculties, good, bad, or indifferent, of the man of genius, enable him to entertain us so effectively that the imaginary scenes and people he has created become more real to us than our actual life—at least until our knowledge and grip of actual life begins to deepen and glow beyond the common. When I was twenty I knew everybody in Shakespeare,

from Hamlet to Abhorson, much more intimately than I knew my living contemporaries.

The Man in the Plays

Taking all due discount from Mr. Shaw's playful "artillery preparation," it may be noticed that, like Coleridge and De Quincey, he found the characters of Shakespeare more real than those of actual life. He also, like Goethe, experienced the peculiar appeal that Shakespeare has to young minds, which kindle like torches at the touch of Shakespeare's sympathy with them. Clearly there must be something more than "vital energy" behind this—some ideal world that opens to the imagination more convincingly than Leigh Hunt's pretty picture or Schlegel's miraculous blend of sublimity and horror.

My own conviction is that only by the study of Shakespeare's—the Stratford Shakespeare's—actual life and plays together can we get at a right sense of what he means to us of this present time. In spite of his supreme power as a creative artist one may still find in the plays that magnetic personality which reveals itself through them. It is magnetic not merely because it is well expressed, but because it was in itself a rare and beautiful personality.

In speaking of the man Shakespeare, we must think not merely of the Shakespeare of legal and parochial records—though they help—but of the ideal Shakespeare. With us all there is a truer self than any register can show—a self which exists not in the accidents of fortune but in the ideals we believe in and which we convey to others. If we search out this Shakespeare we find that he was by no means just an Elizabethan. In spite of his popularity, he was at many points against the spirit of that adventurous but at the same time treacherous and pedantic era. To his contemporaries the doctrines of Machiavelli still appealed as a desirable basis of conduct. Death by torture, brutal amusements, and flagrant immorality were commonplaces. The idea that Shakespeare's magic was due to his being a "child

of his age" is very much overdone. Great things were undoubtedly happening then; but we have definite evidence that the world was every bit as full of stupid, dull, priggish, mean, and generally repulsive people in Queen Elizabeth's reign as it is to-day—if not more so.

Friendship

The ideals that Shakespeare stood for—the things he was keen about, in his order of emphasis—show him to have been very much out of the common order, whether of his day or of ours. As I have already suggested, the chief of these was friendship. It was with Shakespeare not merely something useful and to be cultivated on that account, but a profound passion. We know from the Sonnets, whatever their true history may be, what friendship meant to Shakespeare. Some equable souls—the late Sir Sidney Lee among them—have looked upon these heart-cries as fantastic exaggerations. Not so others. Disraeli, of all people, used not only to uphold Shakespeare's view of friendship, but confessed that his own experience confirmed it. It was Shakespeare's primal and persistent theme. Hamlet wore Horatio "in his heart's core." The quarrel scene between Brutus and Cassius has a personal note that would speak to us just as poignantly if neither Caesar nor the Roman Republic had ever existed. Both *The Merchant of Venice* and *Much Ado About Nothing* are comedies of friendship triumphant. Yet Shakespeare's faith in friendship was peculiarly against the spirit of the time, rife as that was with public and private treachery, from the Throne downwards.

Young and Innocent Love

Another ideal of Shakespeare's that was by no means shared by all his contemporaries was that of young and innocent love. Among all dramatists he was—and is—its supreme champion. Though he ranged "from hell to hell of human passions," he never lost this ideal. He carried it right through from the Biron and Rosaline of his first play to the

Ferdinand and Miranda of his last—youth and faith, brought together by Prospero's art over trackless continents and uncharted seas.

He did more than believe in the inspiring power of young love. He gave it a language which expresses the feelings natural to young people and at the same time ennobles them. He makes youth's wondering hopes and sensitive imaginings articulate. In these days, when the popular bookshelf, the stage, the picture-theatre, and some newspapers are largely reservoirs of weak sentiment and sordid cynicism, the strength and beauty of this one ideal in Shakespeare would in itself answer for much of the passionate homage he invokes.

I remember vividly making a special visit to the sixpenny gallery at the Lyceum during the late Ernest Carpenter's Shakespearian revivals at popular prices in 1908. I wanted just to see to what extent Shakespeare's language was understood by a supposedly uneducated public. The play was *Romeo and Juliet*. The gallery was crowded with young people of the industrial class. They had not yet learned American from the film, and had practically no language to express their intimate emotions, except Cockney monosyllables of a debasing sort.

But there was no doubt about their understanding Shakespeare. They were spell-bound—

Sleep dwell upon thine eyes; peace in thy breast;

Would I were sleep and peace, so sweet to rest !

Not a single word is there, one may notice, unknown to the lowest standard of vocabulary. The emotion is one common to every physically healthy young man and woman. But no one in that old Lyceum gallery could mistake the revelation of Shakespeare's power to give spiritual beauty to what would otherwise be despised and coarsened.

Personal to Shakespeare

Then came the burning flame of his patriotism; his love of country life and its sports, of horses, of pastoral folk, of

flowers; his reverence for music and knowledge of it; his rich and never sneering humour; his keen interest in scientific discoveries; his belief in the dignity of business—a belief for which he has been contemptuously stigmatized as “middle-class,” though it is difficult to see what he had to be ashamed of in this; his faith in manhood and womanhood; his ultimate radiant optimism of a “brave, new world” where Ariel is set free. All these things are true alike of the Shakespeare of the plays and of the Shakespeare who came from Stratford to London, suffered, struggled, won through, and went back to his lovely country home, and died there an honoured landowner and lay-rector.

This “personal-to-Shakespeare” view goes far to account for the magnetism which just puzzled the critics of other generations. It has been enormously helped by the labours of editors and researchers of the past sixty or seventy years. Professor Dowden’s *Shakespeare: His Mind and Art* (1875) was a pioneer work in this respect. Our debt is also incalculable to the late Dr. F. J. Furnivall’s discoveries as to the order of the plays and their dates.

Dr. Furnivall Speaks Out

Let Dr. Furnivall—my indomitable old friend—explain the reason in his own characteristic and lively way, as he did when introducing *The Royal Shakspeare* (1894)—

I believe that all the deepest and greatest work of an artist is based on personal experience. Shakspeare tells me he’s felt hell, and in his Othello, Macbeth, Lear, Coriolanus, Timon, I see the evidence of his having done so. He tells me how he loved his friend, as with woman’s love; and in his Antonio—thrice repeated—his Helena, his Viola, I see his own devoted love reflected. He tells me what his false, swarthy mistress was; and in his Cleopatra I see her, to some extent, embodied. Tradition tells me of the merry meetings at the Mermaid, and the wit-combats there; and in the Falstaff scenes at the Boar’s Head I see these imaged.

The early plays show me what Shakspeare was at the beginning of his career—comparatively poor in nature and

merely sharp and witty. I see him grow in knowledge and experience of life from period to period, almost from play to play, enriching himself with the society of gracious Elizabethan ladies and courtly men, fighting the deepest questions which puzzle the will, getting convinced of the sternness of the Moral Ruler of mankind, of the weakness of his own nature, of the suffering that sin brings.

I see him laying bare his own soul as he strips the covering off other men's and I see him at last passing into at-oneness with God and man, into fresh delight in all the glories of the outer world, and the sweet girls about him in his Stratford home. Then content to sleep. And I refuse to separate Shakspeare the man from Shakspeare the artist. He himself, his own nature and his own life, are in all his plays, to the man who has eyes and chooses to look for him and them there.

Not only in the externals that Dr. Furnivall describes so simply and so vividly does Shakespeare's self-revelation in his characters endear them to us. It may be doubted, for example, if Falstaff would ever have seized upon mankind's imagination as he has done if he had been only an echo and vision of someone heard and seen "at the Mermaid." Is not the immortal part of him an element that is Shakespeare's own? He was, after all, not only the world's greatest jester, but an embodied and, in the end, pathetic assertion of the fallacy that "life is a jest." I believe that this was no mere outward observation with Shakespeare, but something deeply wrought in with his own personal history. It lends an intimate truth to all those "dear fools" of his. I believe that he had it in his blood, and owed it—as Dickens owed Micawber—to his own father, the Stratford alderman, who was a "merry-cheeked old man," and, as we know, came to grief.

Hamlet and Falstaff

As it has a bearing upon Shakespeare's ideals, I may, perhaps, be pardoned for quoting from a comparison of Hamlet with Falstaff which I contributed to the *Frankfurt Romerbergfestschrift*—

The kinship of Falstaff and Hamlet has often been noted, as in Tree's version of Falstaff's soliloquy upon "Honour," spoken in Hamlet's manner. Both of them represent the ultimate failure in practical life of that form of madness called "artistic temperament." It was a failure of the danger of which in himself Shakespeare was keenly conscious. He emphasizes it in his Sonnets—

'Tis true I have been here and there
And made myself a motley to the view,
Gored mine own thoughts, sold cheap what is most dear.

Hamlet was the artist in tragedy; Falstaff the artist in comedy. Both saw life not as a reality, but as a play. Hamlet wanted to dramatize the killing of Claudius instead of doing it; Falstaff sacrificed everything to win laughter by comic adventure or bright retort. His was the tragedy of being a comedian. Both of them are contrasted with men who, without a tittle of their wit or intelligence, keep a practical purpose always in view.

What Fortinbras and Laertes are to Hamlet, Prince Henry and Hotspur are, in the realm of comedy, to Falstaff. Many critics who should have known better have been puzzled by Prince Henry's opening confession of distrust in Falstaff's escapades, his early determination to throw off loose behaviour before long, and his disowning of Falstaff at the finish. But these are definitely in the character of the practical organizer, with that shrewd eye to the main purpose which Falstaff and Hamlet lacked. Prince Henry is no less Shakespeare's ideal of a courageous and responsible commander for being a bit of a prig—every one who has to pretend to be better than his fellows must be that. Nor need Falstaff be the less himself for representing almost everything that a "hero" should not be. Shakespeare had potentially all Falstaff's waywardness as well as his wit; but in practical affairs, after early slips, he was able to borrow something at any rate of his own Henry's wisdom.

Baconian

One reason of the especial value of the closer love and knowledge of Shakespeare brought by the study of his life at Stratford and in London is that it does afford a check to

the weed-growth of the "Baconian," "Oxfordian," and other theories. Ludicrous in itself to any one who even considers the style of the two men, the idea that "Bacon wrote Shakespeare" is now seventy-two years old. It has thrived, partly on its sheer nonsensicality, ever since Miss Delia Bacon published her book, *The Philosophy of the Plays of Shakespeare Unfolded*. She died a lunatic two years after.

In 1887 a new impulse was given, also from America, by the late Ignatius Donnelly's publication of *The Great Cryptogram*, and again in 1900 by Mrs. Gallup's *The Bi-Literal Cipher of Francis Bacon*. Though these have nothing whatever to do with the spirit of Shakespeare, they have fascinated what one may call the jigsaw-puzzle element—a very large one—in the public mind. They have also stimulated the study of Bacon. The cipher itself has had some valuable fruits from the point of view of code-telegraphy and otherwise.

The Bacon Society, to pursue further "Baconian" investigations, was founded in 1885. Its annual dinner has seldom failed to provide fresh entertainment in the shape of some new and wild theory. It has now long been mooted that Bacon was the son of Queen Elizabeth, and the few doggerel versions of the Psalms that are his poetic hostage have fostered a suggestion that credits him with the entire Authorized Version of the Bible.

Three Earls

In the face of speculations of this kind, the comparatively modest Bacon-Shakespeare theory has, in itself, rather dwindled of late. Those who are now on the look-out for a puzzle-author to the plays mostly favour Edward de Vere, the seventeenth Earl of Oxford—a theory put forward in *Shakespeare Identified* by T. Looney (1920). The sixth Earl of Derby and third Earl of Rutland are candidates chosen by French students, A. Lefranc (1919) and C. Demblon (1913) respectively.

It remains probable that Shakespeare, like most great

creative workers, absorbed ideas from every available source. Among his influential friends there may easily have been one who "nightly gulled him with intelligence." The late Mr. Justice Madden's delightful book, *The Diary of Master William Silence*, is suggestive in this matter as in many others. There is no reason to quarrel with the collaboration of Fletcher in *Henry VIII*; perhaps of Marlowe in *Richard III*; and probably of several dramatists in the three parts of *Henry VI*.

But none of these possibilities invalidates the personality that shines through the plays and scenes over the single authorship of which there is no doubt. This personality does happen to coincide just as nearly as need be with Stratford's Shakespeare. Why worry further? Yet over a thousand books have been written to try to prove that Shakespeare was not Shakespeare. It is the old story of the human mind's hunger for something at once finite and startling—something that can be represented by a counter on a table or a stroke of the pen and have in it the thrill of "news." Given this, the simple absence of any manuscript answers for the rest.

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CHAPTER IX

TO MEET THE PURITANS

TO turn from Shakespeare to the other dramatists of those "spacious" days is to find that none beside him quite realized how spacious they were. One cannot see *The Tempest* without feeling that Shakespeare was conscious that a new universe as well as a new hemisphere had come into being.

Had he heard of the Copernican theory, which had been confirmed by Kepler and Galileo just two years before? Apparently not. All his cosmic ideas are based on the old Ptolemaic system of the earth hanging in the middle of things and the spangled heaven moving round. At the same time it is difficult to resist a sense that Prospero's farewell to the "elves" and "demi-puppets"—those "weak masters" by which he had worked the "rough magic" he now abjured—had something to do with the passing of the old science before the new. After all, it had been Mercator's "globe" which inspired the very naming of the ever-famous theatre, and now . . .

In those last days at Stratford, watching the flame from the log-fire at New Place, or taking a turn in the garden to "still his beating mind," Shakespeare had very different material for his imagination to work upon in regard to the greater globe, "and all who it inherit," than had the scapegrace boy of thirty odd years before, listening to the dairymaids' tales of Robin Goodfellow. Ariel himself, released from the cloven pine, flashing in the summer sun or flickering at the mast-head, suggests, as Puck never does, an impersonation of forces now harnessed to the service of man.

Spanish Drama

But if, on that enchanted island, Shakespeare was projecting his fancy "as far as thought could reach," he was most

certainly the only dramatist who was doing anything of the kind. Elsewhere in Europe the drama was, in its most advanced manifestations, centuries behind the times. It was, for the most part, torn between romanticism—then in full flower in the Spanish drama of Lope de Vega and Calderon, telling of an already obsolete age of chivalry—and classicism, destined to return from its tomb and stalk the French stage for a hundred and fifty years, actually wearing its shroud.

Lope de Vega

As for the stupendously prolific Lope, no English critic can, with life at its present length, pretend to be acquainted with even a reasonable fraction of the fifteen hundred plays he wrote—not counting the *autos sacramentales*, or miracle plays, and interludes. This is, of course, consciously. They have reappeared in countless forms. The first act of Bernard Shaw's *Arms and the Man* is almost an exact recapitulation of one of Lope's most famous scenes.

In the main one can hardly do wrong in accepting George Henry Lewes's happy verdict—

If you go to him with critical spectacles dogmatically bestriding your nose, you will be ill-contented. If you expect to find a Shakspeare, a Molière or a Schiller, you may save yourself the trouble. But there is an endless charm in Lope—his gaiety. His unflagging animal spirits, playful irony, and careless gaiety, keep your mind in a constant smile, which gently curls about the lips. There are tragical scenes in his plays and touches of real pathos, which go right to the quivering heart; but they do not abound. Gaiety is the element in which he habitually lives; and though the duels, murders, and violent collisions, which occur so often, may at first sight appear to contradict this opinion, yet a little familiarity with the plays soon detects that such things are little more than jests or commonplaces. They have no sort of tragic influence on the actors.

It is different with Calderon—soldier and priest as well as dramatist, supreme as an author of the sacramental *autos*,

and hailed as the "Spanish Shakespeare." Calderon undoubtedly touches a higher plane of praise than Lope ever did. Though he was not so prolific, his 112 surviving drama and 72 *autos* have dignity and fancy. Some of them have been admirably translated by Edward Fitzgerald, of *Omar Khayyám* fame. But I must confess to having experienced a certain disappointment over the most famous of them, *La Vida Es Sueno* (*Life is a Dream*), when I saw it acted upon the stage in one of the late William Poel's productions. In spite of continual harping upon the charming title, I did not see how this concerned the story of Prince Sigismund's discovery in prison, to finish up after many adventures as a conqueror, more than any other romantic dramas of escapes and revelations and abrupt changes. Here again I find myself in agreement with Lewes—

It seems to me neither more nor less than a very interesting romantic caprice of an ingenious fancy—a play which, in point of treatment, is not more elevated than the cloak-and-sword comedies, although in point of subject it belongs to the region of romance.

"Minor" Elizabethans

Though *Don Quixote* remains one of the best "bedside books" ever written, the Spanish drama of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries does not give us of to-day on the stage a value comparable to Cervantes in literary fiction. It just does not represent the kind of romance suitable to our philosophic and introspective northern temperament. But it was enormously important to its own day. The plots of Lope and Calderon were pillaged by Beaumont and Fletcher, Middleton, Webster, and others of our own Jacobean. These tended to replace the gallantry and sparkle of their originals with somewhat too lingering an emphasis upon unnatural horrors, which the Spanish dramatists took comparatively lightly. But there is one critic—unmatched within his own limits of self-expression—with whom this very fact was an advantage.

One cannot think of the "minor" Elizabethans and Jacobeans without instantly clearing a space for Charles Lamb. He was a champion who is certainly more sure of immortality than several of themselves. However much one may disagree with some of his choices and some of his conclusions, it would be difficult to calculate how much of the fame of the Mermaid men is due to Lamb's personal reaction.

"The Broken Heart"

His salute to them is irresistible. It is part of Lamb himself. Everything and every one he writes about are mixed up with the irony of the queer, punctual, golden-hearted East India clerk, going back after the "day's dry drudgery at the desk's dead wood" to keep high festival in groping through dusty folios. What glory to light upon scenes like that of Calantha, in Ford's *The Broken Heart*, going on with the dance after hearing of the death of all she held dear, and then falling dead herself!—

I do not know where to find, in any play, a catastrophe so grand, so solemn, so surprising, as in this. . . . The fortitude of the Spartan boy who let a beast gnaw out his bowels till he died, without expressing a groan, is a faint bodily image of this dilaceration of the spirit, and exenteration of the inmost mind, which Calantha, with a holy violence against her nature, keeps closely covered till the last duties of a wife and queen are fulfilled. Stories of martyrdom are but of chains and the stake—a little bodily suffering. These torments—

On the purest spirits prey,
As on entrails, joints and limbs,
With answerable pains but more intense . . .

The expression of this transcendent scene almost bears us in imagination to Calvary and the Cross. . . . There is a grandeur of the soul above mountains, seas and the elements.

With this haunting passage in mind, I recall in the later 'nineties seeing a performance of *The Broken Heart* at St. George's Hall—latterly used by the B.B.C. It was an

excellent performance. If I remember rightly, Miss Eleanor Calhoun, a finely temperamental actress, was in the part of Calantha. But it did not stir me to anything like the extent to be expected from Lamb's criticism.

"The Duchess of Malfi"

So, too, with Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*. The tribute of Charles Lamb to that gruesome last scene of mental torture, with its dance of madmen, is in itself unforgettable—

She has lived among horrors until she has become native and endowed unto that element. She speaks the dialect of despair; her tongue has a smatch of Tartarus and the souls in bale. To move a horror skilfully, to touch a soul to the quick, to lay upon fear as much as it can bear, to wean and weary a life till it is ready to drop, and then step in with mortal instruments to take its last forfeit—this only a Webster can do. Inferior geniuses may "upon horror's head horror accumulate," but they cannot do this. They mistake quantity for quality. They terrify babes with painted devils, but they know not how a soul is to be moved. Their terrors want dignity, their affrightments are without decorum.

It has been my lot to see *The Duchess of Malfi* a number of times—both well and badly played; but never has that particular scene appeared to me to be other than a piece of gratuitous sadism on Webster's part. Even so, as Lamb says of "inferior geniuses," it mistakes quantity for quality and essays to terrify with "painted devils."

At the heart of all, it is Lamb's own imagination which lifts these Jacobean "thrillers"—some of them hardly above the Grand Guignol in purpose—to the empyrean of art. We have to recognize how far from normal Lamb was, both in his life and in his nature. It was he himself who knew these "dilacerations of spirit," these "smatches of Tartarus and the souls in bale." We have to recognize that he was not only solitary companion to a sister afflicted with homicidal mania, but in constant dread of what might happen again to his own active and imprisoned mind. Those old horrors

of a vanished stage must have had for him a peculiar solace of make-believe.

Looking at them from the point of view of normal enjoyment and healthy enlightenment, what useless "throw-backs" some of them were! In purpose—either moral or emotional—it would seem as if nothing had advanced since the days of Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*. One recognizes a little more polish in the verse and ingenuity in the exploitation of passion. Otherwise—so far as Lamb's favourites are concerned—Shakespeare might have lived and laboured in vain.

Ben Jonson

On the other hand there are Elizabethan and Jacobean plays which did treasure up values that have not lost their appeal even now, and had in them the seeds of future harvests to be reaped long after. In Jonson's "learned sock"—for all the dullness of his tragedies—realistic comedy was born. Ulrici has some candid things to say about Jonson—

Where he combats folly, vice and senselessness, he forgets his learning, he warms up, his anger gives him concise, sententious language, a certain heavy grandeur; everything, diction and characterization, drawing and colouring, light and shade, are not only correct and appropriate, but full of life and energy. His element is reality.

Of a different, higher poetical truth—a truth in the form of beauty—he is unconscious, or, what is the same thing, when he wishes to represent it (as in his *Masques*), it becomes in his hands an abstract allegory. He cannot collect either ideal or human generalities into an organic whole. On the other hand, for any special given phenomenon he has a sharp eye. He describes only special, rare and strange characters, with quite unusual peculiarities, and he exhibits them only from one conspicuous point of view. For this reason they leave us cold and unsympathetic.

He is never able to forget himself. Wherever we look we have, directly or indirectly, before us, Ben Jonson, his age and convictions and surroundings. . . . His main strength lay in

his chemical power of dissolving and analysing. He destroyed the old poetical world without being able to build a new one in its place.

Comedies of London Life

With all his limitations, there is a strong, virile, highly critical intelligence about Ben Jonson, together with that overwhelming wealth of human as well as classic and curious knowledge, which makes one feel almost guilty about not caring for *Every Man in His Humour*, *Volpone*, *The Alchemist*, and *Epicæne*. It is always the same story. At each Jonson revival, one realizes that here is a grand old master to whom one ought to pay homage. But he never gets near one's inner heart, as Shakespeare does. It is like walking through a store where choice goods are piled lavishly on every side, duly labelled. They are all very wonderful, but they are not always the things that we happen to want. There are some who feel differently, perhaps. *Volpone*, both in adaptations and otherwise, has had recent adventures before a certain public; but not to very large or very pleasant purpose.

I myself much prefer the breeze and vividness of *Bartholomew Fair* with its close-up, Hogarthian panorama of the vigorous, multi-coloured life of the London streets and markets. One feels that all the time Jonson needed something seen, which he could convey and criticize. He had not enough of the woman in him for creation. He tried his hand at everything. His lyrics have a fine-cut grace and there was nothing he did weakly; but his pastoral fragment, *The Sad Shepherd*, must yield place to Fletcher's exquisite *Faithful Shepherdess*, which seems more charming every time it is revived. Dekker, too, was a formidable challenger both as a lyrist and, in *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, as a faithful picturer of London life.

Beaumont and Fletcher

On the romantic plane—not forgetting *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*—Beaumont and Fletcher had quite

understandably a more popular quality. Over those rarely-severed partners Hazlitt gives a noticeably mixed verdict—

They are lyrical and descriptive poets of the highest order; every page of their writing is a *florilegium*. They are dramatic poets of the second class in point of knowledge, variety, vivacity and effect. They are masters of style and versification in almost every variety of melting modulation or sounding pomp; in comic wit and spirit they are scarcely surpassed by any writers of any age. There they are in their element, "like eagles newly baited."

Their serious poetry, with all its richness, sweetness, loftiness and grace, wants something. It stimulates more than it gratifies, and leaves the mind in a certain sense exhausted. Everything seems in a state of effervescence. The ornaments, through neglect or abundance, do not always appear sufficiently appropriate; the characters do not take a substantial form, the passion does not accumulate.

There is a too frequent mixture of voluptuous softness or effeminacy of character with horror in their subjects, a conscious weakness of moral constitution struggling with wilful and violent situations, like the tender wings of a moth, attracted to the flame that dazzles and consumes it. They are not safe teachers of morality, and seem to regard the decomposition of the common affections as a careless pastime. The tone of Shakespeare's writings is manly and bracing; theirs is at once insipid and meretricious in comparison.

Domestic Drama

One thing heralded by the later Elizabethans was the domestic drama. This afforded, with the London comedies of Jonson and Dekker, a home-bred alternative to adapted Italian romance and the cloak-and-sword butcheries from Spain. Thomas Heywood's *A Woman Killed With Kindness*, Massinger's *The City Madam* and *A New Way to Pay Old Debts* set observed and native types working out the impact of incident upon character in the contemporary homes of English country-gentlemen and merchants.

It has been said that the drama had faded away already by the time the Puritans put a stop to it altogether. But this

is not quite so. In Massinger, as the late Arthur Symonds very well suggests, the Jonsonian comedy of "humours" was merging into the comedy of manners. It is possible that, if the times had been less distracted, he and others, including Shirley—who survived to die in the Fire of London—might have bridged over what was to prove a disastrous gap.

Court Masques

There remain the Court masques—those gorgeous extravagances which were the parents of modern opera and ballet. They helped to support Jonson in his later years and to stimulate spectacular production with the arrival of Inigo Jones. But they were all too often affairs of diplomacy to an extent which put them outside criticism. This may be gathered from one of the liveliest first-hand accounts that survive of any performance given during the period between Shakespeare and the Commonwealth. It is by Busino, the Italian, who was present on the first night of *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue*, written by Ben Jonson, staged by Inigo Jones, and presented at Court before King James and Count Gondomar, the Spanish Ambassador. The future King Charles I, who was at that time supposed to be going to marry the Infanta, was Chief Masquer—

They had some mummeries performed in the first act. For instance a very chubby Bacchus appeared on a car drawn by four gownsmen who sang in an undertone before His Majesty, and there was another on foot also in good case and dressed in red, in short clothes, who made a speech reeling about like a drunkard, tankard in hand, so that he resembled said Bacchus's cup-bearer, and this first scene was very gay and burlesque. Next followed twelve extravagant masquers, one of whom was in a barrel all but his extremities, his companions being in like manner cased in huge wicker flasks, very well made, and they danced awhile to the sound of the cornets. . . .

This being at an end, each took his lady, the Prince pairing with the principal one among those who stood in a row. . . . Being well nigh tired, they began to lag, whereupon the King, who is naturally choleric, got impatient and shouted aloud:

"Why don't they dance? What did you make me come here for? Devil take you all, dance!" Upon this, the Marquis of Buckingham, His Majesty's most favoured minion, immediately sprang forward, cutting a score of very lofty and minute capers, with so much grace and agility that he not only appeased the ire of his angry Lord, but moreover rendered himself the admiration and delight of everybody. . . . The story ended at half past two in the morning, and half disgusted and weary we turned home.

This masque had cost £4000—at least £24,000 of our money—but Ben Jonson's share in it did not redound to his credit. Nathaniel Brent wrote to his friend Carleton that "of Ben Jonson divers thinke fit he should returne to his ould trade of bricke-laying againe." If this was the kind of thing that was happening, no wonder Shakespeare, who had died two years before, retired when he did!

"Comus"

With all its incidents of extravagance and vulgarity, and its deplorable record of subservience to political ends, the masque as a form of art had its distinct and abiding dramatic value. Shakespeare used it in his first play and in his last, and it undoubtedly influenced the technique of *Macbeth*. The appearance of Henrietta Maria and the court ladies in masque, long before the Commonwealth, heralded the introduction of actresses on our popular stage at the Restoration. Not least, it was the masque of *Comus* that showed, even more surely than the *Samson Agonistes* of his later years, what the theatre lost through Milton failing to fulfil his first ambition of becoming a dramatist.

Strangely enough, *Comus* actually appeared as a character in that very masque of Ben Jonson's which Busino describes. But he is there an entirely different conception—just a god of gluttony and drink, brought in to the chorus—

Room, room! Make room for the Bouncing Belly,
First father of sauce and deviser of jelly.

All his enchantments—and his pedigree as the son of Bacchus

and Circe—are the fruits of Milton's unaided imagination, save for some touches from Homer's *Odyssey*, these including the drug, "Haemony," which counteracts his spells.

Probably *Comus* is more happily familiar to us of this generation than it has been to any since it was originally performed at Ludlow Castle in 1634, when the Earl of Bridgewater, President of Wales, and his Countess and family, took part. Some of us saw this firstling of Milton's dramatic invention produced at Ludlow Castle itself. Many have seen it presented with far greater beauty and skill and effectiveness in the Open-air Theatre at Regent's Park. There it proved, next to Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the most consistently popular success among Mr. Sydney Carroll's memorable enterprises. This was due very largely to the sympathetic, dignified, and accomplished performance of the Attendant Spirit by Mr. Leslie French. But it is a question how far any actor can be said to "create" a part unless the makings of it are already there.

Actor and Character

The value of an actor—or actress—who brings personal charm and imagination to a character is so obvious to audience and critics that the tendency is, quite naturally, to set everything down to the acting. With Mr. Leslie French this was especially pardonable, as his performance "made all the difference" between practical success and failure. Among the several players of the part that I have seen, he was the only one able to express a certain joy in the play's artificiality without destroying the appeal. On the other hand it is a standing confession on the part of good actors that there can be no great performance without the right material—in spite of all that thankful dramatists and adulatory paraphrasts may say.

So, not forgetting the appropriate magic of the woodland scene on a moonlit summer night, and Mr. Robert Atkins's production, and Lawes's extremely beautiful original music, it is still to young Milton we really owe this "lovely and

desired" thing, as Lawes himself called it. *Comus* is, of course, much more than a masque. It is a pastoral drama as well. The story of the brothers and the lost sister and the enchanter may quite possibly have been taken by Milton from Peele's *The Old Wives' Tale*. But the connexion with *Comus* and his rout is entirely Milton's—as is, of course, the tribute to the neighbouring Severn in Sabrina's song and character. .

As a matter of fact, Milton's indebtedness to Peele is not nearly so great as that to Shakespeare—the Attendant Spirit recalls both Puck and Ariel in line after line. Nor is there much need to go back, as Macaulay does, to Tasso's *Aminta*—that undoubtedly delightful pastoral, written in 1573, with its pretty scene of *Aminta* and the bee. *Aminta* stimulated the vogue of pastorals, and Milton's Italian tour meant much to him. But there had been plenty of pastorals in between, including Fletcher's *The Faithful Shepherdess*.

Puritan Drama

Comus is in an entirely different class from any of these. Among other things, in its frank and noble championship of chastity it stands out as a great pioneer expression of a hope that was never to be fulfilled—the creation of a Puritan drama. No dramatist young or old had suggested anything to compare with Milton's exquisite envoi. This was a new "pastoral stop"—

Mortals that would follow me
Love virtue, she alone is free.
She can teach ye how to climb
Higher than the sphery chime;
Or, if Virtue feeble were,
Heaven itself would stoop to her.

A lifetime of arduous labour and civic strife was to stretch between *Comus* and *Samson Agonistes*. This also many of us have seen played in ideal circumstances—beneath the great Norman arch of Tewkesbury. As an attempted reversion to the forms and "unities" of the Greek drama it has its self-imposed limitations. One can understand that Milton

never expected it to be put upon the stage in his time. It was utterly against the baroque fashions of the heroic drama of the Restoration—not to mention the later Elizabethan orgies of horror and debasement.

“*Samson Agonistes*”

Milton himself, in his foreword, saw fit to—

vindicate Tragedy from the small esteem, or rather infamy, which in the account of many it undergoes at this day, with other common interludes; happening through the poet's error of intermixing comic stuff with tragic sadness and gravity, or introducing trivial and vulgar persons: which by all judicious hath been counted absurd, and brought in without discretion, corruptly to gratify the people.

On the other hand I do not believe that *Samson Agonistes* was written without the thought of presentation in the author's mind. At any rate the blind Milton would not have imagined his lines in print—as some modern poets confess to doing. In his fancy he would have heard them spoken in a theatre of his own, something upon the Greek model.

I always feel that *Samson Agonistes* has a practical dramatic importance that has not even yet been fully recognized. Here is Milton expressing his own life-story through a dramatic medium. From a wholly modern point of view it has masterly touches, not least in the character and description of Delilah—or Dalila, as Milton calls her. With a little shortening of “wave-length”—of which he was fully capable—how much our theatre might have been enriched if Milton had been given a chance of fulfilling his first idea of creating a high and pure tradition of drama as a fruit of the Puritan mind! He himself, we know, made out a list of ninety-three subjects for tragedies—sixty from the Bible, of which Samson was one, and thirty-three from British history. We know that he had planned *Paradise Lost* first as a play.

To the theatre he wished to give, as he put it—

a work not to be raised from the heat of youth, or the vapours

of wine, like that which flows at waste from the pen of some vulgar amorist, or the trencher-fury of a riming parasite, nor to be obtained by the invocation of Dame Memory and her Siren daughters, but by devout prayer to that Eternal Spirit, who can enrich with all utterance and knowledge, and sends out his Seraphim with the hallowed fire of his altar to touch and purify the lips of whom he pleases.

Milton's Humanity

It is all very well to say that this kind of thing does not "belong to the theatre." Why should it not? The theatre was popular enough when it was officially a Temple of Venus. No one objected to it then on the score of its being "religious." Why should it not be regarded, under Christian auspices, as a Temple of the Holy Ghost? This is a very vital question for any who wish to take dramatic criticism seriously. I may return to it in dealing with the Puritan view later. So far as Milton is concerned, it is quite evident that he himself had far more dramatic capabilities in him than he ever allowed to "get through" as things were. They express themselves, in a kind of frustrated way, by the astonishing violence of style that came upon him in some of his pamphlets. He knew what it was to "leave a calm and pleasing solitariness, fed with cheerful and confident thoughts, to embark in a troubled sea of noises and hoarse disputes."

An intense humanity must have lain behind those three marriages—his disillusionment over Mary Powell, the Royalist "bright young person," the brief happiness with Catherine Woodcock, his "late espoused saint," and the consolation afforded to his last years by Elizabeth Minshull, the wife he never saw. How far from truth must be the notion—still prevailing in many quarters—that because Milton was a Puritan he was therefore passionless!

"Histrionastix"

It is well to remember that two years before the performance of *Comus*—that is to say, in 1632—William Prynne's

Histriomastix, The Scourge for Actors, had been given to the world. It represented the less enlightened and, unfortunately, more effectual attitude of Puritanism at large to the theatre. This bulky and ill-digested mass of collected vituperation had nothing like the liveliness of Gosson's *School of Abuse* of forty-three years before, or of Jeremy Collier's *Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage*, which was to come sixty-six years after.

I have found it inexpressibly wearisome. Prynne was put in the pillory and had his ears cut off because his reference to "women-actors" was held to be a reference to Queen Henrietta Maria's performances in a Court masque the same year. To my thinking he deserved the treatment equally for having turned out a book so sour and unhelpful and merely destructive. He seems to have been at any rate a man of immense practical ability, aggressive and determined; and a remarkable thing is that, though a Puritan, he was not a Cromwellian but a Royalist. It says much for his force of character that, in spite of having had his ears twice mutilated and having suffered every sort of obloquy, he became Recorder and Member of Parliament for Bath, was ultimately appointed Keeper of the Tower Records, and died in a hale old age in his seventieth year.

Pagans

But *Histriomastix* is dreary stuff, with its pronouncements against the stage of "55 Synodes and Councils, 71 Fathers and Christian Writers, 150 Foraigne and Domestique Protestant and Popish Authors, and 40 Heathen philosophers, Historians and Poets." These, he claims, combined to assert that—

Stage-plays (the very Pompes of the Devill, which we renounced in Baptisme, if we believe the Fathers) are sinful, heathenish, lewde, ungodly Spectacles, and most pernicious Corruptions, condemned in all ages as intolerable mischiefes to Churches, to Republickes, to the Manners, Minds and Souls of Men, and that the professions of Play-poets and Stage-players are unlawful, infamous and misbeseeming Christians.

At the same time he attests with remarkable precision the hold upon the contemporary public of these inventions of "idolatrous and voluptuous Pagans, impregnated with their infernal issue from Hell itself"—

How many there are [he exclaims] who, according to their several qualities, spend 2d., 4d., 6d., 12d., 18d., 2s., or sometimes 4s., or 5s. at a Playhouse, day by day, if Coach-hire, Boat-hire, Tobacco, Wine, Beere and such like expenses which plays do usually occasion, be cast into the reckoning, and who can never honestly get by their lawful callings half so much!

At almost every point Prynne—at a time which was just as sophisticated upon many of these matters as our own—takes up the old attitude of the Fathers that the theatre was still "pagan," and therefore necessarily an anti-Christian institution. This, as I have already noted, may very probably have influenced Milton—himself none the less strongly attracted by the "well-trod stage"—and was to be repeated later on by Jeremy Collier. It is still, beyond all manner of doubt, responsible for a large amount of antagonism to the theatre on the part of many members of all churches.

Modern Opponents

Even now Roman Catholic priests are not, by canon-law, permitted to attend a public performance in a theatre, though they may in a cinema. Similar considerations may or may not have induced a recent decision on the part of the Church of England Assembly. The attitude of the Free Churches remains in a large measure definitely hostile to the theatre. This is a matter in which honest and sincere and broad-minded dramatic criticism can, to my thinking, yet prove of very great value.

The simple and obvious truth is that historically the theatre as a whole is a pagan institution. So far as there is continuity, that continuity goes right back—as we have seen—to the Roman theatre, and to the jesters and minstrels who represented the wandering inheritors of such scraps of

popular tradition as were left. The liturgy-born miracle play was only a contributory stream which happened to arrive before the recurrence of the classic repertory and its modern developments with the Renaissance. It was by no means the real or main source of modern drama.

On the other hand we must take for granted that the pagan deities—as deities—are, presumably, dead. To be afraid of them is to believe in them. The idea to which St. Augustine subscribed, and upon which Prynne harps, was that they still exist as projections of the spiritual power of the Devil. This is hardly likely to disturb many modern playgoers. We have come to recognize that what was good in the classic and pagan drama represented simple human reactions, imaginings, passions, the sense of beauty in nature and of duty in conduct, the charm of music and of dance, the joy of laughter, the consolation of human sympathy, the criticism of life, history, science, the expression of the individual human heart in physical communion.

“Pagan ” Entertainment

These things may have been once looked upon as worship of whatever gods might be in the Egyptian, Greek, or Roman pantheon. They are still the material of much of our modern dramatic entertainment. The average musical-comedy or beauty-chorus revue still promulgates what used to be regarded as the worship of Venus—it would be ridiculous to pretend that it does not. The average war-melodrama is exactly what would once have been recognized—and is still by cartoonists—as an act of worship to Mars. We are now content to believe that there is no Venus and no Mars—that they just represent human instincts coming within the purview of representatively human drama. Any antagonism to the stage on their account is an antagonism not to Venus and Mars but to something human, bad or good, sincere or insincere, as the case may be.

It does not mean that a theatrical performance of either of these types is necessarily a call to unbridled licence or

savagery. In a Christian country they must naturally accord themselves with Christian morality in so far as that prevails. In this way, the support of the theatre by the Christian churches is all to the benefit both of them and of the theatre. The churches could never absorb in themselves all that happens—and should happen—in a theatre, which is not a church any more than it is now an exclusively pagan temple.

“Apology for Actors”

Even in the England of those seventeenth-century days, before the closure of the playhouses, the spirit of the theatre itself was by no means essentially anti-moral. It was James Shirley, the Royalist playwright, who gave to immortality those noble lines—

Only the actions of the just
Smell sweet and blossom in the dust.

No happier view even of the gayest type of comedy could well be set down than that of Thomas Heywood, author of 220 plays, who neither did nor wrote anything of which he needed to be deeply ashamed. This is what he said in his *Apology for Actors* (1612)—

What is, then, the subject of this harmless mirth? Either in the shape of a clown to show others their slovenly and unhand-some behaviour, that they may reform that simplicity in themselves which others make their sport; else it entreats of love, deriding foolish inamorates, who spend their ages, their spirits, nay, themselves, in the servile and ridiculous employments of their mistresses. And these are mingled with sportful accidents, to recreate such as of themselves are wholly devoted to melancholy, which corrupts the blood, or to refresh such weary spirits as are tired with labour or study, to moderate the cares and heaviness of the mind, that they may return to their trades and faculties with more zeal and earnestness after some small, soft and pleasant retirement.

Sometimes they discourse of pantaloons, usurers that have unthrifty sons, which both the fathers and sons may behold

to their instructions: sometimes of courtezans, to divulge their subtilties and snares in which young men may be entangled, showing them the means to avoid them. If we present a pastoral, we show the harmless love of shepherds diversely moralised, distinguishing between the craft of the city and the innocence of the sheepcote.

Briefly, there is neither tragedy, history, comedy, moral or pastoral, from which an infinite use cannot be gathered. I speak not in the defence of any lascivious shows, scurrilous jests or scandalous invectives. If there be any such, I banish them quite from my patronage.

Coryat's "Crudities"

Suppose, for another pleasant glimpse, we go farther afield and take our stand in Venice with old Coryat, the Somerset farmer, who became jester at Prince Henry's court at St. James's, and proved so genial a critic of drama as well as of manners in the record of his tour of Europe, with the visit to India and the Great Mogul to follow. In Coryat's book of *Crudities* (1611) we see the "charlatans" or "mountebanks" of the *Comme dia dell'Arte*, still engaged as cheap-jacks in putting up their impromptu plays to lure purchasers for the wares of Autolycus in the open market-place—

When I was in Venice they oftentimes ministered infinite pleasures unto me. . . . After the whole rabble of them is gotten up to the stage, whereof some wear vizards, being disguised like fools in a play, some that are women (for there are divers also among them) are attired with habits according to that person that they sustaine; after, I say, they are all upon the stage, the music begins. Sometimes vocal, sometimes instrumental, and sometimes both together. This music is a preamble and introduction to the ensuing matter . . .

These merry fellows do most commonly continue two good hours upon the stage, and at last, when they have fed the audience with such passing variety of sport that they are even cloyed with the superfluity of their conceits, and have sold as much ware as they can, they remove their trinkets and stage till the next meeting.

Martinelli in London

The "merry fellows" of whom Coryat speaks were not, of course, anything new to some among his London readers. Martinelli, the famous Harlequin, had already appeared in London with his troupe by special permission of the Lord Mayor over thirty years before. They were not then much admired by the London crowd. The presence of women on the stage did not please, especially as Nash tells us that they "did forbear no immodest speech or unchaste action that may procure laughter." The idealization of the *Commedia* was a long way off as yet, though Paris was to give it a memorable, prolonged, and fruitful welcome.

Oberammergau Passion Play

One product of the seventeenth century must not be forgotten, especially in view of what I have said about specifically "religious" drama. It was in 1634, after their miraculous preservation from the Black Death, that the peasants of Oberammergau, in the Bavarian Alps, made their vow to present a play of Christ's Passion once every ten years. The vow has been kept ever since, with only occasional variations due to war, like that which summoned the Christus of 1870 to come down from the Cross to serve in the Bavarian artillery.

Many things may happen before each decade brings normally the next presentation. From being a simple village folk-drama, the Oberammergau Passion Play has grown into a world-festival, with strange results, some of them ironically financial. Not only are the conditions different—especially in view of the growth of the audience, with consequent worldly temptations and the film's persistent approaches. The play itself, the music, and the production have all been altered from time to time.

Perhaps it would be best to look at it from two different standpoints—one that of a great Protestant journalist who had hardly been to a theatre in his life before; the other that of an experienced critic, producer, and dramatist.

A Protestant View

Here is what the late W. T. Stead wrote of the Oberammergau Passion Play in 1900—

There, condensed into eight hours or less, is the whole stock-in-trade of the Christian Church. It was in its effort to impress that story upon the heart of man that there came into being all that is distinctively Roman. To teach truth by symbols, to speak through the eye as much as the ear, to leave no gate of approach unsummoned by the bearer of glad tidings of great joy, and above all, in so doing to use every human element of pathos, of tragedy, of awe that can touch the heart or impress the imagination—that was the mission of the Church; and as it had to do with rude and ruder barbarians, the tendency grew to print in still larger capitals. The Catholic Church, in short, did for religion what the new journalism has done for the press. It has sensationalized in order to get a hearing among the masses.

Protestantism, which confines its gaze to the sublime central figure of the Gospel story, walks with averted face past the beautiful group of the Holy Women. Because others have ignorantly worshipped, therefore we must not even contemplate. . . . The most pathetic figure in the Passion Play is not Christ, but His Mother. There is in Him also sublimity. She is purely pathetic. And after Mary the Mother comes Mary the Magdalen. Protestantism will have much leeway to make up before it can find any influence so potent for softening the hearts and inspiring the imaginations of men.

“Devoid of Mystery”

On the other hand, here is Mr. Ashley Dukes's impression of the Passion Play, as presented at the special Tercentenary performance in 1934—

Munich being now a three-hour flight from Berlin, it is possible to lunch in the Northern capital and dine with the strange peasantry of Oberammergau on the eve of their Passion Play performance. The present theatre, which so greatly enlarged the stage and auditorium, dates from the last series of performances in 1930. It is a remarkably ugly building from every angle, and looking towards the stage from the

middle of the auditorium it dreadfully suggests a railroad terminus. . . . The background of the Bavarian hillside remains a restful and lovely feature of the scene.

In the chorus it must be felt that the simplicity of the village-play has to some extent been lost. The pagan chorus was mobile and ecstatic; this chorus is static and pontifical. The contrast is the more noticeable because of the plain debt owed by the modern producer of the Passion Play to the conception of the Attic drama. Unimpeachable sentiments in unpoetic language, sung or intoned by this operatic concourse of performers, will not justify a domination of the stage for an hour—or, perhaps, two hours—out of the seven that the play takes to perform. . . .

The Christus is Alois Lang, a tall, black-bearded man of fine presence and strong voice. . . . His personality is devoid of mystery; nor has he any magic that can transmute the driving of the money-changers from the Temple from an angry expulsion into a breaking of the vials of divine wrath. . . . In no single moment (least of all in the hour of Gethsemane) is the human merged in the super-human of the tragedy. The scenes before Pilate, with the surging crowd, are themselves inspired. It is the mass that triumphs; the insignificant disciples are lost in the deeply significant populace.

A Generation's Changes

The difference between these two impressions—both of them sincere and both probably right from more than a personal point of view—suggests something beyond the fact that one is that of a dramatically unsophisticated layman and the other that of a specialized student of theatrical technique. It suggests that a whole generation had passed between. A great European war had been fought, searing the minds of men. Also new means of communication had broken through the isolation of the once remote Bavarian village and made it a main centre of tourist confluence.

It will be worth while to see next time—if nothing happens meanwhile to prevent the Passion Play altogether—what further changes of spirit will have occurred in the observed and the observers.

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CHAPTER X

ARTIFICE AND THE ACTOR

WE now reach the so-called "age of criticism"—that is to say, the age when the cultivated world, having discovered that a new great force in art had come into being, set itself to discuss the why and the how. It did so with such furious eagerness as almost to stifle the modern drama at birth. It was an age when everybody was a critic. The authors themselves wasted a ridiculous amount of their time and energy on debating critical theory in "defences" and "examens," prefaces and dedications, prologues and epilogues. Whole shelf-loads of pamphlets fostered the interminable discussion of those supposed laws—the unities of time, place, and action.

Criticism and Equity

This was only natural, of course. It was the disease being mistaken for the doctor. True and enlightened criticism is the enemy of laws—nearly all of which are, as I have said, obvious where they are not compulsory, and, if they are laws, will assert themselves anyhow. The usefulness of good criticism is that it replaces laws by helpful understanding. It corresponds in a measure to Equity in the judicial world. But unfortunately there have always been more dull and uncreative people than there have been men of genius. The dull and uncreative people naturally take to law-making; as satisfying their capabilities and vanity at the same time. So these eternal controversies go on reverberating.

Underneath them, none the less, living purposes reveal themselves. It is so even with these unities. Though they were based on an entire misconception of Aristotle, supplemented by Horace's comparatively irresponsible lines, the essence of it all was that the stage was trying to put before itself an aim even then—in verse plays on a platform-stage—

of creating an illusion by scenic realism, or, as Scaliger called it, "verisimilitude." This purpose of "holding the mirror up to nature," which Hamlet was content to impose only upon the actor, would be naturally disturbed by change of place, time, or story on a platform-stage in a yard or hall, supposing an audience dependent upon sight for information. But audiences are not dependent upon sight, as broadcast drama sufficiently proves. A hint is all they should need.

Dodgeries

For myself I find the author who cannot give all necessary hints on these matters, the actor who cannot convey them, and the audience who cannot take them, hardly worth critical consideration. Corneille in his *Examen* upon *The Cid* explains his own difficulties in speeding up action to get it into even a semblance of twenty-four hours, and in bringing Ferdinand to Seville. Shakespeare was extremely clever in his use of "double time"—pointing forward to a short interval before a change of scene, and backwards to a long one after it.

But these are trivial dodges and tricks of theatre-craft, for which the practised hand arranges without thinking. They are problems for producers and apprentice-dramatists. For the critic, who has mostly to deal with spiritual values, to worry too much about these minor technicalities is to superimpose a photographer's studio upon a mountain-view. Granted imagination, the mind of the "intelligent spectator" is surveying not only what is supposed to happen during the course of the action but—from *Oedipus* to *Back to Methuselah*—ages before and after.

One especial debt we owe to the controversies over the unities, over the use of rhyme and over the introduction of comic scenes into tragedy. They provided John Dryden, who was always entertaining as a critic, if not always as a dramatist, with topics for his famous *Essay of Dramatick Poesy* (1668), and for the *Defence* of that essay, and other lively prose-pieces, to which I may return. The real task-masters

of the unities were, of course, Cardinal Richelieu and his Academy, founded in 1635, who called even Corneille over the coals.

Dryden's "Essay"

Dryden is content to mix them all up together—

The Muses, who ever follow peace, went to plant in another country. It was then that the great Cardinal Richelieu began to take them into his protection; and that by his encouragement, Corneille and some other Frenchmen reformed their theatre, which before was as much below ours as it now surpasses it and the rest of Europe.

In the unity of time you find the French so scrupulous, that it yet remains a dispute among their poets, whether the artificial day of twelve hours, more or less, be meant by Aristotle, rather than the natural one of twenty-four; and consequently whether all plays ought not to be reduced into that compass.

In the unity of place they are full as scrupulous, for many of their critics limit it to that very spot of ground where the play is supposed to begin; none of them exceed the compass of the same town or city.

The unity of action in all their plays is yet more conspicuous, for they do not burden them with underplots, as the English do; which is the reason why many scenes of our tragi-comedies carry on a design that is nothing of kin to the main plot; and that we see two distinct webs in a play, like those in ill-wrought stuffs; and two actions, that is, two plays, carried on together, to the confounding of the audience.

Variety

This last point is, it should be added, soon countered in Dryden's dialogue by the opposite view—that Corneille and the other French dramatists under Richelieu's ægis forfeited a good deal by the absence of variety—

Look upon Corneille's *Cinna* and *Pompey*, they are not so properly to be called plays, as long discourses of reason of state; and *Polyeucte* in matters of religion is as solemn as the long stops

upon our organs. Since that time it is grown into a custom, and their actors speak by the hour-glass, like our parsons; nay, they account it the grace of their parts, and think themselves disparaged by the poet, if they may not twice or thrice in a play entertain the audience with a speech of an hundred lines. I deny not but this may suit well with the French; for as we, who are a more sullen people, come to be diverted at our plays, so they, who are of an airy and gay temper, come thither to make themselves more serious.

All this argumentative stool-ball occurs, it may be noted, in a classic of English dramatic criticism which takes practically no account of the things that Corneille really stood for. The qualities that made the social world of its time delight in *The Cid* had nothing to do with the question whether or no it broke the unities, or how far it shocked Richelieu by the duel which wrung the heart of Chimène, its sore-tried heroine. Its ideals of honour, sacrifice, and disinterested love, expressed in noble and impassioned verse—these were the things which gave it a personal appeal over and above the freshly romantic intrigue of Castro's Spanish original. These considerations have been very well put by Benedetto Croce in his essay on *Ariosto, Shakespeare, and Corneille*. It was the man, his message, and his music that mattered.

Three Stories

As for the long-exploded fallacy of an underplot "confounding the audience," one has to go no farther than Shakespeare's own *The Merchant of Venice* to find a play in which three entirely different stories, taken from three entirely different sources, are woven together in such a way that instead of "confounding" anybody they are mutually helpful. The pound-of-flesh story came from *Il Pecorone*, the caskets story from *Gesta Romanorum*, and the elopement of the Jew's daughter from the *Tales* of Massuccio di Salerno. Yet, as has been pertinently suggested by Mr. H. L. Withers in his edition of the play—

If Antonio had not signed the bond, Bassanio could not have

gone a-wooing, if Bassanio had not won Portia, there would have been no one to save Antonio, and if Lorenzo and Jessica had not wandered to Belmont, Portia could not so readily have quitted Belmont for Venice.

While Corneille submitted to the restraint of the unities with difficulty, the thirty-years-younger Racine seems to have taken to them much more by temperament. His scrupulous style and intense concentration upon the psychology of a few closely-studied characters—especially strong-willed and passionate women, like Hermione in *Andromaque* and the Phèdre in whom Rachel and Bernhardt revelled—were helped rather than otherwise by enforced limits. These were to him like tram-lines.

Sainte-Beuve on Racine

Sainte-Beuve is at once characteristically sympathetic and candid—

Racine had a far greater talent for poesy in general than for drama in particular. He was dramatic, no doubt, but he was so in a style that was little so. In other times, in times like ours, when the proportions of the drama are necessarily so different from what they were then, what would he have done? Would he have attempted it? His genius, naturally meditative and placid, would it have sufficed for that intensity of action that our *blasée* curiosity demands? . . . for that higher philosophy that gives to all things a meaning, that makes action something more than mere imbroglia, and historical colour something better than whitewash?

Had he the force of character to lead all these parts of the work abreast? ; to maintain them in presence and in harmony; to blend, to link them into an indissoluble and living form, to fuse them one into the other in the fire of passion? Would he not have found it more simple, more conformable to nature, to withdraw passion from the midst of these intricacies in which it might be lost as if poured into sand?

Molière

At times one is heartily glad that Aristotle himself did not lay down any laws for comedy—and Horace's suggestions,

such as the keeping of unpleasant incidents off-stage, are more or less adjustable matters of taste and common sense. Perhaps this was one reason why both Corneille and Racine were both happy in comedy. Corneille's *Le Menteur* and Racine's *Les Plaideurs* are still deservedly popular.

As for Molière, how good it was for him that, though he had his troubles with the *unco guid* whose entrenched hypocrisy made him wait five years before he could produce *Tartuffe* in public, he was not bound to confine himself to what Terence and Plautus had done beforehand! He could pillage the Italian *commedia* for his Sganarelles and Scapins; he could pillory the blue-stockings and quacks and money-grubbers and social climbers of the real world around him, and lighten the agonizing story of his own life with the laughter and wisdom of *Le Misanthrope* and *Le Malade Imaginaire*.

It is possible that the story of his own unhappy marriage, and the irony of his last appearance in the play he wrote in self-mockery, have tended to soften the tone of his humour for us more than they should. The result is that when he is acted in the right and traditional fashion upon the stage he tends to seem hard and callous. In *Le Misanthrope*, for instance, we expect a suggestion of a lump in the throat over Alceste and Célimène, and we get just high-voiced raillery.

Master of the Laugh

Such is, of course, the right way—the true Molière, as King Louis saw his favourite comedian on the stage. Professor Saintsbury emphasizes this—

May it be permitted to doubt whether Molière really intended to excite all the admiring sympathy which has been bestowed upon Alceste? Without that sympathy he remains an admirably comic figure, but he becomes hardly more of a tragic one than Malvolio, for whom also some respectable persons have tried to excite it. . . . He is a "man of honour," no doubt; but he is also, if one may dare to say so, a "fool of honour," and not a very amiable one. . . .

Molière only asks everything which suggests itself "Can you

help me to make men laugh?" If so, he takes the thing and makes it do this. . . . Of course, he saw the pity of it as well as the fun of it. Of course, if he had not seen the one, he would not have seen the other as he did, and would have been the mere jack-pudding which his enemies would fain have christened him, and which his less-judicious friends take all sorts of injudicious means to prove that he was not. But to obtrude the pity, or the shame, or the sin, or the moral of any kind, was not his object or his business. The object and the business were to isolate the *ludicrum saeculi*—to put "the way of the world" in a comic light of eternity. He achieved them.

Heartlessness

Something of the same heartlessness is what makes our own Restoration comedy so difficult to present and accept in its true value to a modern audience. We tend to worry as to whether we should sympathize with the "filthy fellows" and flaunting wantons of Wycherley and Congreve, though Valentine in *Love for Love* has a certain claim. So far as Wycherley's besmeared coarsening of Molière's perfectly clean creations is concerned, disgust may well prevent any further reaction in a decent modern mind. Congreve is different. He had equally to write for a foul-living and dirty-minded audience, but his mind was not itself a cesspool. Again and again he brings in touches of pure wit and bright imagery as well as that grace and rhythm of sparkling speech which condone so much. But the heartlessness is still there, above all in the women.

Meredith on Millamant

According to George Meredith it is not heartlessness but just common sense—

Comedy is the fountain of sound sense; not the less perfectly sound on account of the sparkle; and comedy lifts women to a station offering them free play for their wit, as they usually show it, when they have it, on the side of sound sense. . . . The heroines of comedy are like women of the world, not necessarily heartless for being clear-sighted; they seem so to

the sentimentally-reared only for the reason that they use their wits, and are not wandering vessels crying for a captain or a pilot. . . .

Millamant, in *The Way of the World*, is an admirable, almost a lovable heroine. It is a piece of genius in a writer to make a woman's manner of speech portray her. You feel sensible of her presence in every line of her speaking. The stipulations with her lover in view of marriage, her fine lady's delicacy, and fine lady's easy evasions of indelicacy, coquettish airs, and playing with irresolution, which in a common maid would be bashfulness, until she submits to "dwindle into a wife," as she says, form a picture that lives in the frame, and is in harmony with Mirabel's description of her: "Here she comes, i'faith, full sail, with her fan spread, and her streamers out, and a shoal of fools for tenders." Célimène is behind Millamant in vividness. An air of bewitching, vivid whimsicality hovers over the graces of this comic heroine, like the lively conversational play of a beautiful mouth.

Dalila

Strange that two such differing dramatists as Congreve and Milton should coincide so nearly in their metaphor for an apparently eternal type of womanhood! Here is Milton's description of Dalila, believed by many to be an orientalized portrait, painted from embittered memory, of Mary Powell, his first wife. It was published just upon thirty years before Congreve's play—

But who is this? what thing of sea or land—
Female of sex it seems—
That, so bedecked, ornate and gay,
Comes this way sailing,
Like a stately ship
Of Tarsus, bound for the isles
Of Javan or Gadire,
With all her bravery on, and tackle trim,
Sails filled, and streamers waving,
Courtèd by all the winds that hold them play;
An amber scent of odorous perfume
Her harbinger . . . ?

So far as criticism is concerned, vivacious argument was kept up by Dryden, Thomas Rymer, and others upon such long-debated questions as the presence of comic scenes in tragedy and of rhyme in heroic verse—which we shall be considering later. But the thing that stirred the whole world of the theatre to its depths was Jeremy Collier's *Short View of the Profaneness and Immorality of the English Stage*. It was published in 1698, just two years before the production of *The Way of the World* and nine years after the accession of William III, to whom Jeremy refused, as a non-juror, to pay homage. There is all the difference between Prynne's gloating pedantries and this admirable and well-reasoned attack on tendencies deserving of everything that was said about them.

Jeremy Collier

Here, for instance, is a criticism which goes much deeper than a mere list of nasty phrases—

To put lewdness into a thriving condition, to give it an equipage of quality, and to treat it with ceremony and respect, is the way to confound the understanding, to fortify the charm, and to make the mischief invincible. . . . If this be not their aim, why is lewdness so much considered in character and success? Why are their favourites atheistical, and their fine gentlemen debauched?

A fine gentleman is a . . . swearing, smutty, atheistical man. These qualifications, it seems, complete the idea of honour. They are the distinguishing glories of birth and breeding. The restraints of conscience are unbecoming a cavalier. What can be the meaning of this wretched distribution of honour? Is it not to give credit and countenance to vice, and to shame young people out of all pretence to conscience and regularity? They seem forced to turn lewd in their own defence. They can't otherwise justify themselves to the fashion, and keep up the character of gentlemen.

Obscenity in any company is a rustic, uncreditable talent, but among women 'tis particularly rude. Do the women leave all the regards to decency and conscience behind them, when

they come to the playhouse? . . . Modesty was designed by Providence as a guard to virtue, and that it might be always at hand is wrought into the mechanism of the body. 'Tis likewise proportioned to the occasions of life, and strongest in youth when passion is so too. 'Tis a quality as true to innocence as the senses are to health; whatever is ungrateful to the one is prejudicial to the other.

Against old Jeremy's searching championship of good taste—combined, as it was, with a genuine respect for clean and reputable art—Congreve's unwise and feeble reply was the failure it could not help being. So, with the brilliance of Farquhar and the coarseness of Vanbrugh, the comedy of manners disappeared in a much-needed wash-tub—to emerge a whole generation after in Sheridan's purged and perfected aftermath.

Steele on Etheredge

After a little more than a decade—in 1711—Steele in *The Spectator* was following up, with somewhat belated boldness, what had already become a minority fashion. He chose for his objective Sir George Etheredge, who had been dead for seventeen years, and his thirty-five-year-old play, *The Man of the Mode*. This is what Steele then said—

I will take for granted that a fine gentleman should be honest in his actions, and refined in his language. Instead of this, our hero is a direct knave in his designs and a clown in his language. . . . The negligence of everything which engages the attention of the sober and valuable part of mankind appears very well drawn in this piece. It is a perfect contradiction to good manners, good sense and common honesty, and there is nothing in it but what is built upon the ruin of virtue and innocence. . . . It is nature in its utmost corruption and degeneracy.

Critics and Actors

An important development of criticism—at any rate English criticism—through the middle years of the eighteenth century was the transfer of main attention from plays to

actors. No great new dramatist was to make his arrival until Goldsmith with the coming of *She Stoops to Conquer* in 1773. The dreary intervening trough of tame tragedy, Italianate farce, and the sentimental comedy to which Steele himself harmlessly contributed has come to represent so much "museum stuff." Excellent for an academic thesis or documentary appendix, it is otherwise just dead and never likely to live again.

With the passing of Betterton, and the homage paid him, we are made to realize that, unlike the play, the actor can be given a further life in criticism. Indeed, it is remarkable how often it is only after he is dead that critics discover how great an actor was—or seemed to be. It may be that this is largely just part of the magic of memory, which has a power of casting off the material rubble and finding the soul of the performance. This is not by any means necessarily the soul of the actor himself. It is a spiritual creation, born partly of the play, partly of the actor and all that appertains to him upon the stage, and partly of the audience, which the critic—or whoever is the recorder of impressions—represents in so far as he is a sympathetic member of it. The achievement was—and is—communal; but the credit went—and still goes—to the actor. He is the obvious focus. After he is dead and cannot benefit, the idealizing process is immune from contradiction.

Betterton

So we find with Betterton. In Steele's famous essay in *The Tatler*, there is no comparison of him with other actors. It does not tell us how Betterton avoided being acted off the stage by Iago, which so often happens in a modern production. It simply records the different effect of seeing Othello played by a "wonderful" actor (even in a garbled version) as compared with reading the play—

The wonderful agony which he appeared in when he examined the circumstances of the handkerchief in *Othello*; the mixture of love that intruded upon his mind, upon the

innocent answers Desdemona makes, betrayed in his gesture such a variety and vicissitude of passions, as would admonish a man to be afraid of his own heart; and perfectly convince him, that it is to stab it, to admit that worst of daggers, jealousy. Whoever reads in his closet this admirable scene, will find that he cannot, except he has as warm an imagination as Shakespeare himself, find any but dry, broken, and incoherent sentences; but a reader who has seen Betterton act it, observes, there could not be a word added.

As will be seen, the word *wonderful*—for which we nowadays condemn our gallery enthusiasts—is the only part of this criticism that really belongs to Betterton, as apart from Shakespeare as a dramatist and Steele as a sensitive playgoer.

Colley Cibber

For a far better suggestion of Betterton himself we can go to his fellow actor, Colley Cibber. It is clear from Cibber's *Apology* that the magic of Betterton lay chiefly in his dignified sincerity of voice and manner—

In the just delivery of poetical numbers, particularly where the sentiments are pathetic, it is scarce credible upon how minute an article of sound depends their greatest beauty. . . . Betterton had a voice which gave more spirit to terror than to the softer passions. . . . In *Othello* he excelled himself; which you will easily believe when you consider that, in spite of his complexion, *Othello* has more natural beauties than the best actor can find in all the magazine of poetry.

The person of this excellent actor was suitable to his voice, more manly than sweet, not exceeding the middle stature, inclining to the corpulent; of a serious and penetrating aspect; his limbs nearer the athletic than the delicate proportion; yet, however formed, there arose from the harmony of the whole a commanding mien of majesty, which the fairer-faced or (as Shakespeare calls 'em) the "curled darlings" of his time ever wanted something to be equally masters of.

With the arrival of journalism as a profession, dramatic criticism should have been born, but it hardly was. Between the gossip paragraphs—generally spiteful, as some are

to-day, where the flesh-and-blood stage is concerned—and graceful essays “discovering” the theatre as a place of fashionable resort, little criticism worth preserving appeared till well on in the eighteenth century. “Critics,” even as late as Garrick’s time, meant coffee-house gossips. Even those who got into print at any length did not always do honour to their calling.

Addison on Critics

In a *Spectator* of 1714, Addison, whose *Cato* had been a political success the year before, administers a reproof to the critics of his own day. It has a certain appropriateness to our own time as well, and perhaps to all times—

I do not indeed wonder that the actors should be professed enemies to those among our nation who are commonly known by the name of critics, since it is the rule among these gentlemen to fall upon a play, not because it is ill-written, but because it takes. Several of them lay it down as a maxim, that whatever dramatic performance has a long run, must of necessity be good for nothing; as though the first precept in poetry were *not to please*. . . .

It is our misfortune, that some who set up for professed critics among us are so stupid, that they do not know how to put ten words together with elegance or common propriety, and withal so illiterate, that they have no taste of the learned languages, and therefore criticize upon old authors only at second-hand. They judge of them by what others have written, and not by any notions they have of the authors themselves. The words *unity*, *action*, *sentiment* and *diction*, pronounced with an air of authority, give them a figure among unlearned readers, who are apt to believe they are very deep because they are unintelligible.

The ancient critics are full of the praises of their contemporaries; they discovered beauties which escaped the observation of the vulgar, and very often find out reasons for palliating or excusing such little slips and oversights as were committed in the writings of eminent authors. On the contrary, most of the smatterers in criticism who appear among us,

make it their business to vilify and depreciate every new production that gains applause, to descry imaginary blemishes, and to prove by far-fetched arguments that what pass for beauties in any celebrated piece are faults and errors.

Macklin as Shylock

In spite of all this—and Addison had probably every reason for his outburst at a time when the spirit of the satire and the lampoon was everywhere dominant—true and helpful criticism was on its way. The coming-out of Rowe's edition of Shakespeare in 1709 had in the end its effect in giving at any rate a challenge to such travesties as Lord Lansdowne's *Jew of Venice*, with its comic Shylock. It is pleasant to know that when Charles Macklin determined in 1741 to restore *The Merchant of Venice* to the stage, with "the Jew that Shakspeare drew," critics of a kind did join in the welcome. He himself told his biographer, Cooke—

On my return to the green-room after the play was over, it was crowded with nobility and critics, who all complimented me in the warmest and most unbounded manner, and the situation I found myself in, I must confess, was one of the most flattering and intoxicating of my whole life. No money, no title, could purchase what I felt. And let no man tell me after this what Fame will not inspire a man to do, and how far the attainment of it will not remunerate his greatest labours. By G-d, sir, though I was not worth £50 in the world at that time, yet, let me tell you, I was Charles the Great for that night.

It is a pity that we have no classic criticism of that eventful evening, with its triumph of sincerity and truth in acting and loyalty to Shakespeare. The cast would have repaid critical study. We do not know what Quin did with Antonio—whether he sawed the air and recited the lines in his impassive tragic manner or admitted some of those natural touches which made him so good a Falstaff. We know that Kitty Clive—that "merry little devil"—was accustomed to give imitations of well-known lawyers of the day as Portia in

Lord Lansdowne's version. Whether Macklin—or Fleetwood, the manager—allowed her to do so on this occasion must remain in doubt.

Garrick

We know more of the arrival of Macklin's brilliant young disciple, Garrick, at Goodman's Fields only a few months after. From the first Garrick was his own excellent press-agent. On the very next morning the *Daily Post* came out with a statement that the tragedy of *King Richard III* was performed gratis at the late theatre in Goodman's Fields, that the character of Richard was taken by a gentleman who never appeared before, and that the reception was "the most extraordinary and great that was ever known on such an occasion."

A few days later *The Champion* went into further particulars—

His voice is neither whining, bellowing, nor grumbling, but perfectly easy in its transitions, natural in its cadence, and beautiful in its elocution. He is not less happy in his mien and gait, in which he is neither strutting nor mincing, neither still nor slouching. When three or four are on the stage with him, he is attentive to whatever is spoke, and never drops his characters when he has finished his speech by either looking contemptuously on an inferior performer, unnecessarily spitting, or suffering his eyes to wander through the whole circle of spectators. His action is never superfluous, awkward, or too frequently repeated, but graceful, decent and becoming.

Hamlet's Tears

Here was, at least, a piece of honest criticism. If it does not convey to us the greatness of Garrick, it gives an enlightening view of the manners of his contemporaries upon the stage. But this sort of thing is not creative. It is not the kind of dramatic criticism that lives on its own account. Apart from the enormous mass of stories and phrases about Garrick—not forgetting the "puffs" that he wrote himself—

the best record of his emotional work and its method and appeal is undoubtedly that of the German, Lichtenberg. Garrick could be "terrific"—but so have been many other actors. There was clearly no end to his cleverness in bustling comedy, and in characters as difficult and different as Sir John Brute and Abel Drugger. His powers of sheer mimicry, however varied, were shared by Estcourt and others both before and after his own time—and in ours. His real hold upon hearts as well as minds was undoubtedly that "on the stage he was natural, simple, affecting." His power of moving an audience by actual tears—above all at a time when to be "manly" was a matter of vital importance—deserves more attention than has yet been paid to it. Here is Lichtenberg's remembrance of his Hamlet—

In the fine soliloquy "O that this too, too solid flesh would melt," Garrick is completely overpowered by the tears of just grief for a virtuous father. . . . Of the words "so excellent a king," the last word is quite inaudible; you only perceive it by the motion of the mouth, which closes immediately afterwards firmly, and trembling with agitation as if to repress with his lips the only too clear indication of the grief which might unman him. This way of shedding tears, which shows the whole burden of inward grief, as well as the manly soul suffering under it, carries one irresistibly away.

"King Lear"

So also with Garrick's Lear—which he played, it is to be remembered, without a beard, and looking not like Elijah but like John Wesley. Of this O'Keefe, the dramatist, said in his *Recollections*—

I liked him best in *Lear*. His saying, in the bitterness of his anger, "I will do such things—what they are I know not," and his sudden recollection of his own want of power, were so pitiable as to touch the heart of every spectator. The simplicity of his saying, "Be these tears wet?—yes, faith," putting his finger to the cheek of Cordelia, and then looking at his finger, was exquisite.

With the coming of Garrick, to be followed by Siddons and Kemble, and then Edmund Kean and Macready, criticism tended in England during the second half of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth to become a chorus of praise—or, at least, of analytical observations—about the great actor or actress of the time being. Nothing was done in England to correspond with the creative work of Lessing, who “gave Goethe to Germany,” and whose own lively and forceful personality shines through every page he wrote.

Lessing and “Romance”

The so-called “romantic movement” which he is credited with having started was, of course, not necessarily towards “romance” in the medieval sense, but towards the enfranchisement of imagination in every direction. He himself helped to found German comedy in *Minna von Barnhelm*. What really happened was very largely the discovery of Shakespeare and of the new world and new impulse that he brought—and still brings—to each generation. It is, as I have striven to show, not merely “romance” that is his magic, but an ideal of humanity expressed within the Elizabethan patterns of art and society through which he had to work. At the touch of Shakespeare came the response of awakening genius in Goethe and Schiller, as in France later on in Victor Hugo and de Musset. But how different they all were, both from him and from each other!

Nor did any English critic achieve the practical effect of Lessing's French contemporary, Diderot. From the purely technical point of view, Diderot's famous *Paradoxe sur le Comédien*, and its study of real emotion in the mind of the actor, leads to pedantry in criticism when it is overdone. Everybody who has acted, even as an amateur, knows that one's mind is a mush of all sorts of conscious and sub-conscious experience and effort. By habit and imaginative concentration an actor can work up an emotional force not only up to but far beyond his personal capacities in that

direction. Diderot's basing of an argument on Garrick's gamut of grimaces is an after-dinner triviality; but when Garrick cried on the stage as Hamlet or Lear before the public and for money he probably put into it the instinctive expression of every real-life emotion of the kind that occurred to him as well as all he had rehearsed and imagined. He may at the same time have been quite conscious of a flickering wick among the primitive "floats" of his time.

Experience shows that when the character to be played coincides—however vaguely—with some intense experience in the actor's own life, sheer habit prompts both the method and force of the expression. We may be certain that Kean put into his Shylock—consciously or no—an enormous deal of the emotions of outraged pride that had tormented him in his forlorn years as he tramped from barn to barn. But this did not prevent him from thinking out every gesture, accent, and suggestion of character, and carrying the emotion through in the framework of his plan.

Diderot's "Paradoxe"

This kind of thing just fills up the crannies of criticism. Diderot's real value to the French stage was that, both as dramatist and critic, he helped to introduce there the drama of current middle-class life—the *tragédie bourgeoise* and the *comédie larmoyante*. This was already popular in England, where, as we have seen, it had been the bequest of Shirley and Heywood long before. It was to be the forebear of the middle-class comedy of Augier and Ohnet, of "drawing-room drama" and "Sardoodledom," ultimately of the Dumasian problem play, which was never without its emotional side, of the domestic realism of Ibsen himself, of Chekhov's Russian ironies, and altogether of at least three-quarters of modern comedy and drama.

On this side of the Channel, the importance of the actor and actress seemed to blind our critics to almost everything else that was happening. Neither Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* nor Sheridan's *The Rivals* was hailed with anything

like a corresponding achievement in criticism. Not long ago, on looking up the contemporary notice of *The Rivals* in *The Morning Post*, I found just a paragraph to the effect that it was a failure on its first performance and was being rewritten to suit the actors.

One reason for concentration upon acting may have been that, since the reign of Garrick, the stage and auditorium had become divided into different worlds. Though there was still something of an "apron" to the stage, and stage-boxes and proscenium doors were to survive even to the present day, the stage had now acquired an atmosphere of comparative mystery. The audience were kept not only off the stage but as far as possible on their own side of the curtain. Though it was not until the coming of gas that the lighting could be controlled, the very darkness of the stage could be—and was—used with haunting effect. So there came into being a new element of glamour—an appeal to the imagination which was all to the greater glory of the player.

Siddons

This was the new theatre to which the majesty of Siddons appealed as something super-human. With a reversal of mood not rare in London's theatrical history, the next morning's papers "raved" over her return in 1782, as Isabella in Southerne's *The Fatal Marriage*, to the Drury Lane she had left an ignominious failure six years before. Far the best account of those early performances of Siddons is the article written in *The English Review* on all the characters of her first season. It was by Thomas Holcroft, the shoe-maker's son from St. Martin's, who was to go over to Paris and memorize *The Marriage of Figaro* in the following year, to be imprisoned and very nearly hanged for his Republican tendencies, but none the less to become the author of *The Road to Ruin* and of *A Tale of Mystery*, the first "melodrama," of the old half-operatic style, to be produced in this country. Holcroft's reasoned appreciation is obviously trustworthy. He tells us that Siddons, whose personality was

to become above all things regal and awe-inspiring, impressed him then by her naturalness—

No studied trick or start can be predicted, no forced tremulation, where the vacancy of the eye declares the absence of passion, can be seen; no laborious strainings at false climax, in which the tired voice reiterates one high tone beyond which it cannot reach, can be heard; no artificial heaving of the breasts, so disgusting when the affectation is perceptible; none of those arts by which the actress is seen and not the character, can be found in Mrs. Siddons. So natural are her gradations and transitions, so classical and correct her speech and deportment, and so exceedingly affecting and pathetic are her voice, form and features, that there is no conveying an idea of the pleasure she communicates by words. . . . She copies no one living or dead, but acts from nature and herself.

Edmund Kean

With the entry of Edmund Kean into Drury Lane on that immortal January night of snow and slush in 1814, first-night criticism counted for more than it had ever done before and perhaps since. Wretched though the audience was, the critics were there, and among them William Hazlitt of the *Morning Chronicle*. One might almost say, "For Kean; see Hazlitt." Indeed, with or without Kean, there is hardly a single play of Shakespeare's upon which a young critic cannot take down his Hazlitt with advantage, and "get something to start off with." He may disagree with it; but how helpful the chance of saying so!

Upon Kean himself, Hazlitt's view is not always borne out by other observers. Here, for instance, is what he says about Kean's Richard III—

Mr. Kean's manner of acting this part has one peculiar advantage; it is entirely his own, without any traces of imitation of any other actor. . . . The opening scene, in which Richard descants on his own deformity, was conceived with perfect truth and character, and delivered in a fine and natural tone of varied recitation. . . . The concluding scene,

in which he is killed by Richmond, was the most brilliant. He fought like one drunk with wounds. The attitude in which he stands with his hands stretched out, after his sword is taken from him, had a preternatural and terrific grandeur, as if his will could not be disarmed, and the very phantoms of his despair had a withering power.

Another Richard

A few days after, Crabb Robinson of *The Times* saw Kean in the same character. His absolutely candid diary gives an impression which is, in several matters, the direct contrary of Hazlitt's. On 7th March, 1814, he writes—

At Drury Lane and saw Kean for the first time. He played Richard, I believe, better than any man I ever saw; yet my expectations were pitched too high, and I had not the pleasure I expected. The expression of malignant joy is the one in which he surpasses all men I have ever seen. His most flagrant defect is want of dignity. His face is finely expressive, though his mouth is not handsome, and he projects his lower lip ungracefully. . . . He satisfied my eye more than my ear.

His action was very often that of Kemble, and this was not the worst of his performance; but it detracts from his past boasted originality. His declamation is very unpleasant, but my ear may in time be reconciled to it, as the palate is to new cheese and tea. His speech is not fluent, and his words and syllables are too distinctly separated. . . . The concluding scene was unequal to my expectation. He did not often excite a strong persuasion of the truth of his acting, and the applause he received was not very great. . . . I do not think he will retain all his popularity; but he may learn to deserve it better.

Lamb and the "Old Actors"

A remarkable thing is that the greatest genius among the London critics of that time, who lived through the careers of both Siddons and Kean and must have seen both of them constantly, gives us practically no declared reminiscence of them. Charles Lamb chose his own themes. They belonged

to another world than that of the theatrical news of the day. The "Mr. K." and "Mrs. S." who occur as side-glance illustrations of his *Essay on the Tragedies of Shakespeare* leave not much doubt of their identity; but it would seem the very fame of these players convinced him—not rightly, perhaps—that the greater tragedies are at their best acted by the imagination of the reader at his fireside.

If Lamb had set out to be logical—and Heaven forfend he should ever have done that!—he would have remembered that every one had not got his imagination. Other people's minds were not, as his was, stored with memories of performances on the stage, which he could improve upon in his thoughts. But the immediate traffic of criticism was not Lamb's affair. He "wrote for antiquity." As a matter of fact he was for a fortnight my predecessor—on trial as dramatic critic for *The Morning Post*. He was not given the position, though he continued to supply jokes. The performances he recalled afterwards—*The Old Actors* and *The Artificial Comedy of the Last Century*—were so far away when he wrote about them that they were hardly real at all. Yet he has made them much more vivid and beautiful things to us than many current productions that we saw yesterday or the day before.

They live and move still before our eyes—Munden "wondering, like primeval man with the sun and stars about him"; Dicky Suett, with his "O La"; the "gay boldness" of Jack Palmer as Joseph Surface; old Dodd and Miss Pope "the perfect gentlewoman." These bright figures that rustle and sparkle through his essays would be only vulgarized and spoiled if one thought for a moment that they were human players over whom another critic might differ, or who would be likely to demand a rise in salary on the score of a "good press."

Dream Friends

I like to think of them as pure inventions of Lamb's own—appropriate products of the relief he so bravely sought from

an always imminent sorrow by keeping a kind of old curiosity-shop in the background of his fancy. They are his dream-friends, of whom he cannot believe that the comedy they played was intended to have anything so solid as a moral purpose—though most assuredly it was. With all their complete incorrectness as workaday models, it is possible that those essays of Charles Lamb have made more people love the theatre than any criticism that has ever been written.

They are also profoundly if not commercially true. The more one sees of plays, the more one is bound to realize that "these our actors are all spirits." What is real to them is unreal to us. Their effect upon us is all that we share. They must pass and have their day. Only the idea of them, which is the critic's merchandise, and sometimes the play itself, remain.

Leigh Hunt

Though he was six years younger than Hazlitt, and nine years younger than Lamb, Leigh Hunt could probably claim to be—as William Archer describes him in the introduction to *Dramatic Essays*—the "first English dramatic critic." This is in the sense that he was "the first writer of any note who made it his business to see and report upon all the principal theatrical events of the day." As a boy of nineteen he became dramatic critic of his brother's daily paper, *The News*,—transferring three years after to his own paper, *The Examiner*, for which he was dramatic critic for five years. Then came a gap of seventeen years, after which for a year and five months he wrote the entire four pages of his own unsuccessful daily paper, *The Tatler*, in which dramatic criticisms were the chief feature.

In the arduous circumstances one should, perhaps, forgive Hunt for proving sometimes distinctly tame in comparison with Lamb, and even with Hazlitt. He made it his confessed aim to be "nothing if not critical." He failed to consecrate "the grins of Munden" with fancies of his own. But,

considering his youth, the notices in *The News* are remarkably well written and perceptive. His *Autobiography*, too, gives an entertaining as well as instructive picture of the state of affairs prevailing between press and theatre in the early days of the nineteenth century. At certain points, something not altogether different from the present paragraphist's world seems to be suggested—

Puffing and plenty of tickets were the system of the day. It was an interchange of amenities over the dinner-table; a flattery of power on the one side, and puns on the other; and what the public took for a criticism on a play was a draft upon the box-office, or reminiscences of last Thursday's salmon and lobster-sauce. The custom was to write as short and favourable a paragraph on the new piece as could be; to say that Bannister was "excellent" and Mrs. Jordan "charming"; to notice the "crowded house," or invent it, if necessary; and to conclude by observing that "the whole went off with *éclat*." A critical religion in those times was to admire Mr. Kemble; and at the period in question Master Betty had appeared, and been hugged to the hearts of the town as the "young Roscius."

It is to Leigh Hunt's honour that, in spite of his youth and inexperience, he stood out against all this. He did his best to treat the drama seriously as an art. He was independent, even to the extent of getting his brother to pay for the paper's ticket to the theatre. The result was, as he himself tells us, that his views came to be respected far beyond the value even he put upon them.

The First Woman Critic

While Lamb and Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt enjoy their deserved prominence in the critical firmament, it is only fair that we should pay a certain special tribute of memory to one of their feminine contemporaries—Elizabeth Inchbald, actress, novelist, playwright, editress, and charming woman. She may not have been actually the first woman critic.

Mrs. Aphra Behn had done something of the kind. But Mrs. Behn did not leave behind anything like the survey of the entire dramatic literature of her period that Mrs. Inchbald did. Nor did she view the theatre in the same enlightening way from a Regency gentlewoman's standpoint of morals and manners. In my book, *Elizabeth Inchbald and Her Circle*, I had the pleasure of paying such tribute as I could to the delightful personality of this Norfolk farmer's daughter, who shared Siddons's early privations—including a dinner off raw turnips in a field—and lived to become the adored "little old lady" of Drury Lane, keeping her dairymaid-duchess prettiness and her self-respect to the last.

Her critical fame will rest upon the task set her by Longman of editing—or, at any rate, writing prefaces to—his edition of *The British Theatre*. The main difference between Mrs. Inchbald's criticisms and those which a modern critic would write is that she hardly worried at all about truth to life. It was far more important that the moral should be "just"—that it should coincide with a certain scheme of desirability which no one of that period dreamed of living up to. Also it was demanded that the manners of all except the low-comedy scenes should be "elegant." Given these essentials, all was well. If by any chance there should be introduced any single character that could be described as "new to the stage," this was an occasion for something very like genuine excitement.

"Speed the Plough"

Upon the score of "decorum in love," she objects to Morton's racy rural comedy, *Speed the Plough*, which introduced Mrs. Grundy to the world. Here the heroine falls in love with the squire's son disguised as a ploughman. That this should happen offended Mrs. Inchbald to the quick. She could only understand it on the assumption that "some preternatural agent whispered that he was a man of birth." In any case she preferred to impute the cause of this sudden passion to some "magical information," conveyed either by

"the palpitation of the heart, or the quickness of the eye," rather than to the "want of female refinement."

She damns with very faint praise the simplicities of that estimable, if ponderous, homily in homespun, *George Barnwell*, with its story of the once-hopeful apprentice who became a thief and a murderer through the allurements of a light-o'-love. It had been popular, she confesses, but "revived notions of elegance in calamity have, in late times, reduced the play to a mere holiday performance." It was, of course, habitually produced at Christmas, before the pantomime and "guyed" by a noisy and impatient audience.

Concerning her Shakespearian criticism one can speak in little else but terms of apology. Mrs. Inchbald simply did not understand Shakespeare. His bold fancy and free humanity were too wholly at variance with the traditions of her time. His pompously noble characters—particularly those of them, like Coriolanus and his good mother Volumentia, which come nearest of any to boring us—were regarded by her with reverential awe. He was still "The Bard." His heroines were either tragedy-queens or *ingénues*, and were similarly respected. Almost anything that verged from these ideals she seemed to lament.

Mrs. Inchbald's Shakespeare

For *The Tempest* she not only tolerates Dryden's travesty, with its introduced alternative lovers, Hippolyto and Dorinda, but she glories in them—

It would never [she says] have become a favourite on the stage, without the aid of Dryden's alteration. The human beings in the original drama had not business enough on the scene to make human beings anxious about them.

Of *King Lear* she publishes, of course, Tate's happy-ending version. Desdemona is described as a "young and elegant female over whom every auditor feels himself agitated with interest."

Over *Romeo and Juliet* (of which she gives Garrick's hotch-potch) she evinces a curious lack of enthusiasm—

Otway [she says] would have rendered it more affecting. . . . The reason that auditors cannot feel a powerful sympathy in the sorrows of these fervent lovers is because they have witnessed the growth of their passion from its birth to its maturity. They do not honour it with that worth of sentiment, as if they had conceived it to be of longer duration, fixed by time and rendered more tender by familiarity. The ardour of the youthful pair, like the fervency of children, affords high amusement without much anxiety that their wishes should be accomplished.

One could hardly find a better example of her criticism at its sternest than that upon *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. She had an evidently strong objection to Falstaff, of whom she writes—

Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth, had more respect for Falstaff than for the tender passion, or she certainly would not have wished it disgraced by such a votary. But possibly there may have been morality in her desire, for volumes written against the fatal delusions of love could never be so effectual a cure for sighing youth or pining damsel as to behold their own disorder raging in the bosom of one so little formed to excite a sympathetic sensation.

Women Dramatists

When it comes to the tradition of gay, bustling comedies which did survive amidst the eighteenth century's banal sentiments and glamorous terrors, Mrs. Inchbald knew everything there was to know. Without a trace of jealousy, she praises the plays written by other women dramatists. In her age they were a comparatively new thing. She was born only eighty years after the death of Aphra Behn, the "George Sand of the Restoration" and undoubted pioneer in England of the play-writing sisterhood. The interval is almost exactly filled up by two other women playwrights. One was Mrs. Centlivre, authoress of *The Busybody*, adapted from Molière's *L'Étourdi*, and of that admirable acting-comedy, *The Wonder: A Woman Keeps a Secret*. The other

was Mrs. Cowley, the "Anna Matilda" of the Della Crusicans and authoress of *The Belle's Stratagem*, in the first production of which, at Covent Garden, Mrs. Inchbald herself had appeared.

So far as Aphra Behn is concerned, Mrs. Inchbald could not do anything in particular, for the simple reason that Mrs. Behn's plays, though brisk and witty, were hardly of the kind a lady could praise. True, the worst that Aphra Behn wrote was not nearly so vile as the things that were written about her. Mrs. Centlivre is different. She, too, is credited with some gay adventures; but she had the advantage of being married to Queen Anne's cook. Mrs. Inchbald launches into fearless encomiums of her. There is no question as to a happy idea lurking behind each of Mrs. Centlivre's comedies. *A Bold Stroke for a Wife*, with its skit upon Quakers, has enriched our language with "the real Simon Pure." Garrick's choice of the part of Don Felix in *The Wonder* as that in which he should bid his farewell to the stage, was by no means an unworthy honour to the "wrangling-lovers scene."

Mrs. Cowley, though *The Belle's Stratagem* was to hold the stage longer than anything by Mrs. Centlivre, had less genius than the other two. Her efforts at tragedy were anything but triumphs. One of them, *The Fate of Sparta*, called forth a famous epigram from Parsons, the actor—

Ingenious Cowley, while we viewed
Of Sparta's sons the lot severe,
We caught the Spartan fortitude,
And saw their woes without a tear.

In spite of Mrs. Cowley's limitations—and although, as a younger rival, Mrs. Inchbald might have had some excuse for mentioning them—our critic finds only what was good.

Old Farces

Still more in her *Collection of Farces*, published some three years after, Mrs. Inchbald holds a ground upon which

modernity cannot challenge her. We have grown accustomed to elaborate and highly-mechanized three-act farce—the type which Sir Arthur Pinero brought to perfection—and we have farces of ideas, like *The Importance of Being Earnest* or *Fanny's First Play*. But we have nothing that corresponds with the short, free-and-easy farce of character—with or without songs—in which the eighteenth century revelled.

For this reason—if for no other—it is worth while to turn over some of these old pages even now. One does not find great literature. One does not find what we should call careful dramatic joinery or playcraft. But in such farces as *The Devil to Pay*, *No Song No Supper*, *Raising the Wind*, and a host of others, there was an irreplaceable rough-and-tumble spirit and at the same time appetite for characters. The nearest we can get is in revue and broadcast-sketches. It was no mere accident that Dickens in his youth devoured Mrs. Inchbald's *Farces*, and confessed afterwards how much he owed to them. Alfred Jingle—first cousin of Jeremy Diddler in *Raising the Wind*—was not the only Pickwickian who walked straight out of Mrs. Inchbald's pages to take on a new immortality.

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CHAPTER XI

THE PASSING OF "HEROICS"

BEFORE we bid good-bye to the shallow artifice, forced sentiment, and false morality that contented Mrs. Inchbald in her graver moods, it may be well to turn back for a moment to something of which the afterglow was still lingering in her early days. I mean the old "heroic" drama of Dryden and his seventeenth-century friends and rivals. For serious dramatic purposes the "heroic" drama, with its conscious bombast, exotic themes, deeds of violence, and interminable love-and-honour debates in rhyming verse, spoken by gorgeous figures, plumed and periwigged, in front of gaudily conventional scenery, did not outlast the generation that gave it birth. Indeed, it actually flourished for little more than fifteen years.

The "heroic" rhymed couplet, however, which was to so large an extent its "signature," remained all through the eighteenth century the unchallenged vehicle of prologue, epilogue, and official theatrical utterances of every kind. It still lives in that most permanently popular of all forms of dramatic entertainment in England—the Christmas pantomime. Also there is no kind of dramatic writing which has enshrined as well as inspired so much lively and forcible criticism.

"The Siege of Rhodes"

So far as drama was concerned there remains no doubt that the idea of the "heroic" rhymed play was brought over from France by D'Avenant. His opera, *The Siege of Rhodes*, produced at Lincoln's Inn Fields in 1661, and in part at Rutland House before the Restoration, was—according to Professor Edward J. Dent in his *Foundations of English Opera*—originally written as a drama in rhymed "heroic" couplets in imitation of Corneille. D'Avenant had converted it into an opera just

as a means of getting it presented at all, in view of the Puritan ban upon regular plays. At King Charles's suggestion, Orrery then tried his hand; but it was "glorious" John Dryden who was to be the "heroic's" supreme exponent and champion.

In the prologue to *Secret Love, or The Maiden Queen* (1666) he makes no secret of his purpose or its source—

He who writ this, not without pains and thought
From French and English theatres has brought
The exactest rules by which a play is wrought:
The unities of action, place and time;
The scenes unbroken and a mingled chime
Of Jonson's humour, with Corneille's rhyme.

"All for Love"

Just eleven years later, in the composition of his Antony-and-Cleopatra tragedy, *All for Love* (1677), a change of plan was to be announced—

In this [Dryden tells us] I have professed to imitate the divine Shakespeare, which that I might perform more freely, I have disencumbered myself from rhyme.

In the meantime, none the less, he had set an undoubted temporary vogue for the "heroic" with the success of *Tyrannick Love* (1669) and *The Conquest of Granada* (1670). In his *Essay of Heroic Plays* (1762) he showed frank satisfaction with the result up to that time—

Whether heroic verse ought to be admitted into serious plays [he wrote] is not now to be disputed: 'tis already in possession of the stage; and I dare confidently affirm that very few tragedies, in this age, shall be received without it.

Even after *All For Love* he was to return to rhyme in *Aureng-Zebe*—his drama about the incestuous love-affairs of the contemporary Mogul emperor. The play was recently revived, but turned out a very poor and unconvincing

“museum” piece. In his prologue to it Dryden confessed that he was beginning to lose faith in his “long-loved mistress, rhyme,” and to recognize that “passion’s too fierce to be in fetters bound.”

Rhyme in Shakespeare

Wisdom after the event suggests that if unbroken rhyme had been an ideal dramatic medium, Shakespeare, who started as an all-out rhymester, would not have gradually dropped it, as he did. Ultimately, as we know, he relegated it to doggerel tags and passages where the pressure of inspiration is noticeably low. Even in his first play, *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, where the rhymed lines as against blank verse are in the proportion of two to one, all the memorable things, like Biron’s apostrophe to love, have cast off the shackles in favour of blank verse. The use of rhyme had already been found needless by Marlowe. In his prologue to *Tamburlaine the Great* he scornfully refers to “the jiggling veins of rhyming mother-wits.” It is clear, one may admit, that the rhymes he was referring to were not those of the always dignified—sometimes too dignified—“heroic” pentameter as Dryden exploited it.

Possibly certain deficiencies in Dryden himself were also to blame for the speedy fading-out of the “heroic” rhymed play. There has been a great scholastic vogue in Dryden lately. This may be partly because his virile and active mind expressed itself in so many ways, including some of the best critical prose ever written. The fact remains that as a dramatist he is just a sometimes-magnificent workman. He knew all the models and technical tricks. He was alive to every movement of his day. He was a great journalist. He understood that what the little world of the Restoration theatre wanted at each point was something that seemed new and startling. The rules and rhymes from France appeared at the time fresh ideas. So, with the help of bombast, horrible scenes, unnatural crimes, and florid spectacles, the “heroic” play did for a time enjoy exciting response. But

the vibration of moral and decorative extravagance against technical severity could not have lasted for long on its own account. Inevitably it grew stale.

Baroque

In his *Dramatic Theory and the Rhymed Heroic Play*, Dr. Cecil Deane compares the adventure to a corresponding development in architecture—

The "heroic" play shows a kind of logical audacity which may be best termed the baroque spirit. . . . The style, which permitted the utmost amount of grandiose display within a more or less conventional framework, was the product of the Counter-Reformation, and was adopted by the Jesuits in order to popularize Catholic orthodoxy. The architect set before him the same aim as the "heroic" dramatist, which was, in Dryden's words, "to endeavour an absolute dominion over the minds of the spectators."

The inherent weakness of both forms consisted in an over-reliance on the element of surprise; so that, when the novelty of its first triumph had worn off, the "heroic" play tended to deteriorate into a thing of spectacle. Similarly baroque architecture degenerated into the Churrigueresque or rococo. On the one hand we have the spectacular excesses of a play like *The Empress of Morocco*; on the other the riotous confusion caused by the lavishness of applied ornament—the flowers, shells, scrolls and medallions, which bespangle the pillars of the Sacristy of the Cartuja at Granada.

Thomas Otway

As we have seen, the real trouble was not only the "inherent weakness" of this heavily "stylized" form of drama. It was that at once the rules, the rhymes, the bombast, and the ornament were an artificial means of trying to conceal a lack of genuine creative power in the dramatist himself. To be sure, there was one dramatist of genius, Thomas Otway, who did come for a time under the influence of the "rhymed heroic"; but he soon threw it off for a return to

the freedom of Elizabethan blank verse. He was also responsible for the arrival of an appeal of pathos and of simple human passion which gives, as none of Dryden's dramatic writing does, the impression of being part of himself.

With his customary candour, Dryden recognized that in these respects he was beaten by Otway. Though Otway had faults of his time, no tragic play of the period has gripped me with the emotional power of *Venice Preserved*—especially on its production by the Phoenix Society; with those two fine actors, the late Ion Swinley and Mr. Baliol Holloway as Pierre and Jaffier, and Miss Cathleen Nesbitt as Belvidera. Here, instead of a mass of "heroical" rhodomontade, we have the definite clash of friendship and loyalty. With it was coupled the real, abject ardour of love that Otway had himself experienced, as we learn from his letters to Mrs. Barry, Lord Rochester's mistress, the beautiful but fickle actress for whom the character of Belvidera was written. Whether or not she drove Otway to his early and miserable death, he had the consolation of seeing her play his heroine. She did so, by all accounts, extremely well.

Truth and Intensity

It is not our knowledge of Otway's hopeless attachment that matters. It is the fact that this inspires the play with a human truth and intensity which needs no support either of spectacle or rhyme. So, too, in a smaller measure, with *The Orphan*, and its intimate contrast between sincerely-loved husband and lustful seducer. It is no matter for wonder that Otway's plays have lived consistently on the stage through nearly three centuries—an honour shared by neither Dryden's nor Lee's nor Orrery's, nor by those of any other of the "heroic" dramatists.

I am glad to find Professor Allardyce Nicoll, in his *History of Restoration Drama*, challenging the late Sir Adolphus Ward's "too severe" estimate of Otway. Professor Nicoll is not given to uncalled-for praise. Of *The Orphan* he says—

Viewed from amidst the dull heap of expiring heroes and

banal heroines, this tragedy is one of the utmost merit. It has brought true pathos into drama, pathos and sentiment, told in a manner at once vigorous and calm. It would have been a masterpiece in any age: it was a triumph in its own.

" Venice Preserved "

He is even more decided over *Venice Preserved*—

The ending of this play is magnificent, closing upon the poor, misguided Belvidera's madness and the noble release of Pierre from the ignominy of the gallows. There is something in a poet's heart always revolutionary, and even though Otway was one of Dryden's persuasion—a monarchical absolutist—in this play he shows his sympathy for souls who struggle up out of the rut of life—out into the spacious sunlight of rebellion.

There are firm-hearted, single-spirited Pierres who live to-day: there are cowardly Renaults, half-conspirators, half-egotistical libertines: there are Jaffiers who sway between the ideal of revolution and other ideals: there are Belvideras, too, who, unconscious of the fact, mar men's ideals and men's lives. It is truly the highest art that is universal in this way and for all time, and who will deny that Otway has reached the very summit in that regard?

I may add that this attitude towards Otway—not always prevalent among critics, as witness Sir Adolphus Ward—confirms that of Thomas Thornton, who was responsible, according to the Hon. Roden Noel in the *Mermaid* introduction, for "the best edition of the poet's works" and the "best sketch" of his life. Thornton, who happens to have been my grandfather, was on the staff of *The Times*, for which he wrote many theatrical notices in the days of Siddons and Kean. He was a stern moralist and disciplinarian, by no means inclined to condone Otway's weaknesses, and attracted only by the high and enduring quality of his genius as a dramatist. In a private diary that he left behind him, Thornton deploras the degradation of the stage of his day—apart from one or two great players—and the general lack

of understanding, which then prevailed, as to its educational value.

Satire

One curious reason hastened the decline of the "heroic" play. Though the rhymed couplet showed itself unsuitable and monotonous as the sole vehicle of serious English drama, it had proved—as it still proves, with its simple swing and counter-swing—exactly fitted for satire. It was, in fact, used superbly for that purpose by Dryden himself, as by every satirist from Pope to Byron, and on to the present day. It became not so much the language of drama as of criticism, and, above all, of that half-creative form of criticism—burlesque. Already, before Dryden's farewell to it in *Aureng-Zebe*, the rhymed couplet had been mercilessly turned back at the "heroic" playwrights' heads in Buckingham's skit, *The Rehearsal*—now a surer and much more familiar classic than most of the plays it ridicules. Both its prologue and epilogue are sound and searching criticism in verse—

Here brisk, insipid wits, for wit, let fall
 Sometimes dull sense, but oftener none at all.
 There strutting heroes, with a grim-faced train
 Shall brave the gods in King Cambyzes' vein.
 For (changing rules of late, as if men writ
 In spite of reason, nature, art and wit,)
 Our poets make us laugh at tragedy
 And with their comedies they make us cry . . .
 Wherefore for ours and for the kingdom's peace,
 May this prodigious way of writing cease;
 Let's have, at least once in our lives, a time
 When we may hear some reason, not all rhyme.

After this, not to mention *The Rehearsal* itself, with its bibulous Kings of Brentford and the wordy prowess of Drawcansir, who boasted that he "slew both friend and foe," one can understand even Dryden recognizing that fashion had changed and that the hour for forsaking his "long-loved mistress" for good was drawing near.

Prologue and Epilogue

The value of the "heroic" for prologue, epilogue, and any lightly sententious or satirical rhetoric, had been, of course, shown long before even the arrival of the "heroic" play. Ben Jonson, though he abjured it for plays themselves even more readily than Shakespeare, was a master of the "heroic" rhyme for other purposes—as his immortal tribute to the "Swan of Avon" proves well enough. His prologue to *Every Man in his Humour* is a vigorous assertion of his purpose as the writer of a "comedy of humours." It is also an invaluable sidelight upon the drawbacks of the sort of stage that he and Shakespeare had known. He bade his audience see a play—

as other plays should be,

Where neither chorus wafts you o'er the seas
 Nor creaking throne comes down the boys to please:
 Nor nimble squib is seen to make afeard
 The gentlewomen; nor rolled bullet heard
 To say, it thunders; nor tempestuous drum
 Rumbles, to tell you when the storm doth come;
 But deeds and language such as men do use,
 And persons, such as comedy would choose,
 When she would show an image of the times,
 And sport with human folly, not with crimes.

Though it is usually attributed to Fletcher, there is an ease and variety about the rhyming prologue to *Henry VIII* which makes one feel something of the music Shakespeare might have drawn out of the "heroic" if he had used it more in his maturer days—

I come no more to make you laugh: things now,
 That bear a weighty and a serious brow,
 Sad, high, and working, full of state and woe,
 Such noble scenes as draw the eye to flow,
 We now present . . .
 Be sad as we would make ye: think, ye see
 The very persons of our noble story,
 As they were living; think, you see them great,

And followed with the general throng and sweat
 Of thousand friends; then, in a moment, see
 How soon this mightiness meets misery:
 And if you can be merry then, I'll say,
 A man may weep upon his wedding-day.

Nell Gwynn

How much of the success of *Tyrannick Love* was due, one wonders, to Dryden's own brilliant and ever-famous epilogue "spoken by Nell Gwynn, when she was to be carried off dead by the Bearers." Certainly it is more universally remembered than anything in the play itself, and gives one a better idea of Nell Gwynn's personality, through her own mouth, than any chronicle—

Hold! are you mad, you damned confounded dog?
 I am to rise and speak the epilogue . . .
 I come, kind gentlemen, strange news to tell ye;
 I am the ghost of poor departed Nelly.
 Sweet ladies, be not frighted, I'll be civil;
 I'm what I was, a little, harmless devil . . .
 As for my epitaph, when I am gone,
 I'll trust no poet, but will write my own.
 "Here Nelly lies, who, though she lived a slattern,
 Yet died a princess, acting in St. Catherine!"

Some peculiarly vivid impressions of the Restoration audience as they appeared to the actor, actress, and dramatist can be got from those prologues and epilogues of the later seventeenth century. They have one merit above the more polished addresses of the eighteenth—they did not treat their "friends in front" to the fulsome flattery which grew so tedious later on, or make appeals to pity or forbearance. All through them one feels that players and authors alike despised their public. They had, apparently, every reason to do so. Here, for instance, are the last lines of Mrs. Aphra Behn's almost savage prologue to her play, *The Rover, or The Banished Cavaliers*. Whether any of its hearers recognized themselves or no is not recorded—

The younger sparks who hither do resort
 Cry, "Pox o' your gentle things! Give us more sport." . . .
 Such fops are never pleased unless the play
 Be stuffed with fools as brisk and dull as they.
 Such might the half-crown spare, and in a glass
 At home behold a more accomplished ass;
 Where they may set their cravats, wigs and faces,
 And practise all their buffoon'ry grimaces—
 "See how this huff becomes—this damme stare!"—
 Which they at home may act because they dare . . .
 O that our Nokes, our Tony Lee, could show
 A fop but half so much to th' life as you!

Pope on the Stage

The master of all other devices within the scope of "heroic" verse did not—wisely, perhaps—turn it to dramatic purpose. Pope's *Essay on Criticism* practically ignores the drama. It might have been written by someone who had never been inside a theatre; but he atoned for this with his prologue to Addison's *Cato*. His dream of a British stage wholly devoted to native art and noble exaltation has hardly been realized yet, and probably never will be. If *Cato* itself failed to "make the grade" in its appeal to posterity, that was hardly Pope's fault—

To make mankind, in conscious virtue bold,
 Live o'er each scene, and be what they behold:
 For this the tragic muse first trod the stage,
 Commanding tears to stream throughout every age.
 Tyrants no more their savage nature kept
 And foes to virtue wondered how they wept.
 Our author shuns by vulgar springs to move,
 The hero's glory or the virgin's love:
 In pitying love we but our weakness show,
 And wild ambition well deserves its woe . . .
 While Cato gives his little senate laws,
 What bosom beats not in his country's cause?
 Who sees him act, but envies every deed?
 Who hears him groan, and does not with him bleed? . . .
 Our scene precariously subsists too long

On French translation and Italian song.
 Dare to have sense yourselves; assert the stage;
 Be justly warm'd with your own native rage!
 Such plays alone should please a British ear
 As Cato's self had not disdained to hear.

Garrick as Poet

The most prolific and lively of all "heroic" prologue-writers was undoubtedly Garrick. He knew exactly what his actors and actresses—and he himself—could do to get the audience into a good humour. What sly and sparkling touches Mrs. Abingdon must have put into that epilogue he wrote for her to give a comic finish to Murphy's tragedy of *Zenobia*! Still more, what easy mastery of character, both as author and as actor, must have been behind Garrick's own appearances in his own prologues—as, say, the "Country Boy" who heralded Brown's *Barbarossa* by looking for his "measter" in the pit and gallery, or as the "Sailor (fuddled)" who came on singing "How pleasant a sailor's life passes" in front of *The Mask of Britannia*!

From a critical point of view one of the most incisive and informative of the Garrick prologues was that spoken by himself in front of Whitehead's *The School for Lovers*. He was supposed to be recounting a talk with the author—

"Not change your scenes?" said I, —"I'm sorry for't;
 My constant friends above, around, below,
 Have English tastes, and love both change and show:
 Without such aid even Shakespeare would be flat,
 Our crowded pantomimes are proof of that.
 What eager transport starts from every eye,
 When pullies rattle and our genii fly!
 When tin cascades, like falling waters, gleam,
 And through the canvas bursts the real stream;
 While thirsty Islington laments, in vain,
 Half her New River rolled to Drury Lane!
 Lord, Sir," said I, "for gallery, boxes, pit,
 I'll back my Harlequin against your wit."
 Yet still the author, anxious for his play,

Shook his wise head—"What will the critics say?"
"As usual, Sir, abuse you all they can?"
"And what the ladies?"—"He's a charming man!
A charming piece!—One scarce knows what it means;
But that's no matter when there's such sweet scenes."

Johnson's Masterpiece

One can understand how effective all this must have been when it was Garrick who spoke it. It reveals still a popular taste in Garrick's time not altogether different from tendencies perceptible nowadays—in spite of the rivalry of the cinema. But Garrick's prologues grew more and more to rely on the actor or the actress. They do not survive on the strength of their own ring of phrase and precision of thought as did those of his old friend and instructor, Dr. Johnson. The prologue Johnson wrote for the opening of Drury Lane under Garrick-and-Lacy's management in 1747 remains the unchallengeable masterpiece in its own kind. Here were dignity blended with wit, satire as agreeably free from spite as from remorse, a critical history of our stage condensed into a few minutes' utterance, a theatrical philosophy at once concise and unanswerable. The opening lines about Shakespeare and "panting Time" have become so hackneyed that people are apt to forget how much else there is in that "copy of verses." How true, even now, the couplet upon Ben Jonson's fate!—

Cold approbation gave the lingr'ing bays,
For those who durst not censure scarce could praise.

Almost as true—and not less sacrificially candid, for there was much in Dryden that Johnson regarded with almost religious reverence—was his view of "the wits of Charles," whose "reign was long," till "virtue called oblivion to her aid." Not least, there is hardly a single actor or servant of the "many-headed" master who would not still subscribe to Johnson's ultimate concession—

Hard is his lot that, here by fortune placed,
Must watch the wild vicissitudes of taste:

With every meteor of caprice must play,
 And chase the new-blown bubble of the day.
 Ah, let not censure term our fate our choice,
 The stage but echoes back the public voice;
 The drama's laws the drama's patrons give,
 For we that live to please must please to live.

“The Rosciad”

From a purely critical view not many efforts in “heroic” rhyme of that age can vie in force and genuine value with Churchill's *Rosciad*. For all its unflinching candour in regard to the eighteenth century stage, it was by no means altogether unfair. One need not wonder at its bringing sudden fame and the beginning of what might have been fortune to the obscure curate of St. John's, Westminster. It is not merely a satire. Churchill gives even to his most ruthless caricatures a touch of portraiture that makes them live. Even for the victim himself, it was an achievement to have inspired such lines as these upon Quin—

His eyes in gloomy socket taught to roll,
 Proclaimed the sullen ‘habit of the soul’:
 Heavy and phlegmatic he trod the stage,
 Too proud for tenderness, too dull for rage.
 When Hector's lovely widow shines in tears,
 Or Rowe's gay rake dependent virtue jeers,
 With the same cast of features he is seen
 To chide the libertine and court the queen . . .
 In whate'er cast his character was laid
 Self still, like oil, upon the surface played.
 Nature, in spite of all his skill, crept in:
 Horatio, Dorax, Falstaff—still 'twas Quin.

What dramatic pungency he gives to his description of Barry as Hamlet, at the time when the ghost of “buried Denmark” is just about to appear!—

Some dozen lines before the Ghost is there,
 Behold him for the solemn scene prepare;
 See how he frames his eyes, poises each limb,
 Puts the whole body into proper trim—

From whence we learn, with no great stretch of art,
Five lines hence comes a ghost—and Ha ! a start !

Churchill as Critic

It is to Churchill's credit that—whatever his faults as a man and as an ordained minister of religion—he was absolutely honest as a critic. He gave unstinted praise where he felt it deserved—as with Kitty Clive and Mrs. Cibber and Garrick. He was prepared to take without flinching whatever attacks his judgments brought about. In his *Apology* he defends his method with vigour against critics who seem to have been just as abusive but less ingenuous—

A critic was of old a glorious name,
Whose sanction handed merit up to fame;
Beauties as well as faults he brought to view,
His judgment great, and great his candour, too;
No servile rules drew sickly taste aside;
Secure he walked, for Nature was his guide.
But now—O, strange reverse !—our critics bawl
In praise of candour with a heart of gall;
Conscious of guilt, and fearful of the light,
They lurk enshrouded in the veil of night;
Safe from detection, seize the unwary prey,
And stab, like braves, all who come that way.

After Johnson, the fine flavour of prologue and epilogue began to be less conspicuous. Though Sheridan wrote some, his wit did not shine between the formal ding-dongs of "heroic" verse. It needed the free rhythm of that scintillating prose over which his mastery was unrivalled. There was another reason, too. It is explained in the prologue—which Sheridan himself did not write—to *The Critic*, his delightful adaptation of the idea of *The Rehearsal* to a new theme and another age. This reason was (as the Hon. Richard Fitzpatrick, the prologue's author, tells us) that the plays themselves were less inspiring even to satire—

In those gay days of wickedness and wit,
When Villiers criticized what Dryden writ,
The tragic queen, to please a tasteless crowd,

Had learned to bellow, rant, and roar so loud,
That frightened Nature, her best friend before,
The blustering beldam's company forswore . . .
The frantic hero's wild delirium past,
Now insipidity succeeds bombast;
So slow Melpomene's cold numbers creep,
Here dulness seems her drowsy court to keep.

Prologue and Public

So prologue and epilogue faded out—partly through sheer inanition, and partly through the arrival of a new and less intimate public, without either technical or traditional knowledge of the stage, upon whom adroit allusion would be naturally wasted. Another change that has to be reckoned was brought about by gas. This made the turning down of the lights in the auditorium a sufficient hint that the play was starting. In times when the house-lights had to be on all the while a definite occurrence was needed, beyond the stoppage of the orchestra (if any) and the three knocks, to mark the opening and to get the audience into listening trim.

Whether something in the nature of a prologue should be generally revived or not is a question that has often been raised. The answer is that where there is no need there is no time. As things are, most plays on their first night are so late in beginning that everybody who really cares is impatient for the curtain to rise upon the opening scene, and at the finish most people want to get off as quickly as ever they can. For gala occasions we still have prologues—generally in the old rhymed “heroic”—and in revue the compère does his duty in giving a rough idea of anything we ought, or ought not, to know beforehand.

Impromptu Epilogues

Undoubtedly modern stage-management does not always cope with possibilities at curtain-fall as fully as it might. At times one feels that a written epilogue would be happier than the often feeble impromptus of the leading man or

leading lady—not to say the entire cast and the author himself. The trouble would be, of course, that if there were a written epilogue, the personal receptions afterwards would still be called for, and probably responded to. The best way out seems to be just for someone to prepare three speeches very carefully—one in case of obvious failure, one in case of triumphant success, and one in case of a half-and-half verdict which has got to be made to appear like a success. The last of them is, of course, the only one that really matters—and it does matter a very great deal!

But though prologue and epilogue passed away, the old "heroic" lived on. It was welcomed to a new home, in which it could be found flourishing honourably very nearly a hundred years after, in burlesque. Beyond all question it had a magical effect upon that ancient form of comedy, which goes back not merely to Aristophanes, but to Susarion and the old "satyric" dances of Greece and to recitals of the mock-Homeric poem, *Batrachomyomachia*, recounting the *Battle of the Frogs and Mice*. Perhaps the peculiar fitness of the "heroic" line for burlesque was the actual result of its unsuitability to the tragedies for which it had been used. Its lack of variety and of "lift," and its pompous restriction of all expression to direct antitheses, were exactly right for the conveyance of punning phrases and immediate contrasts between the sublime and the ridiculous.

"The Knight of the Burning Pestle"

Until its arrival—so far as our English stage was concerned—written burlesque or extravaganza as a definite form of dramatic parody was comparatively rare. Shakespeare only gave us snatches, like the clowns' play in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. For modern purposes, Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* is generally counted the pioneer, with its Don Quixote satire in Ralph, the romance-struck grocer's apprentice, whom Mr. Noel Coward played so memorably as a young actor of twenty in the Kingsway revival. But *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* is

at the heart of it a comedy of real characters—its scenes of parody arrive only incidentally. Even *The Rehearsal*, like *The Critic*, which was to follow it after just over a century, was a comedy with burlesque interludes.

The first full-blown modern burlesque, beginning and ending as a parody, was to come almost exactly between them. It was Henry Fielding's *The Tragedy of Tragedies, or The Life and Death of Tom Thumb the Great*. The theatrical scholarship Fielding lavished upon that celebrated and once immensely popular work has its inevitable drawbacks for producing present-day laughter. So much of it relies upon a knowledge of long-forgotten originals—Dryden's *Conquest of Granada*, Thomson's *Sophonisba*, Lee's *Mithridates*, Addison's *Cato*, and the rest. It is in some ways better to read than to see acted, because one can look at the parodied lines on the same page. Often they are just as ridiculous as the burlesque, and sometimes more so. But this "spotting" of sources is at the same time the death of true humour and of true perception. The best things in *Tom Thumb*, after all, are lines that have a touch beyond annotation, like the mock-simplicity of the famous mock-simile—

So, when two dogs are fighting in the streets
With a third dog one of the two dogs meets,
With angry teeth he bites him to the bone,
And this dog smarts for what that dog has done.

"Chrononhotonthologos"

Far less subtle though it be, there is more of the broad slash of the kind of burlesque that survives its victims about *Chrononhotonthologos*, which arrived four years later and was by Henry Carey, author of *Sally in our Alley* and forebear of Edmund Kean. "Go call a coach and let a coach be called!" still rings in everybody's memory almost as surely as the old song that brought Carey his greater fame. The prologue, too, has a straightforward punch about it that Fielding's learned and allusive preface had perforce to forfeit—

To-night our comic muse the buskin wears
 And gives herself no small romantic airs . . .
 In ridicule's strict retrospect displays
 The poetasters of these modern days,
 Who with big, bellowing bombast rend our ears,
 Which stript of sound quite void of sense appears;
 Or else their fiddle-faddle numbers flow,
 Serenely dull, elaborately low.

"Bombastes Furioso"

Another burlesque of the pre-punning period that can boast of lines that are classics on their own account was William Barnes Rhodes's *Bombastes Furioso*, first played at the Haymarket in 1810. It was a much cleverer little skit than its recent comparative neglect suggests. The first words of Fusbos, Minister to Artaxominous the Great, King of Utopia, have always seemed to me a particularly neat hit at the courtly formalities prevailing in romantic plays even within memory—

Hail, Artaxominous, y'clept "the Great" !
 I come, an humble pillar of thy state,
 Pregnant with news—but ere that news I tell,
 First let me hope your Majesty is well.

Nor should the succinct finality of Bombastes's epitaph go without recognition—

Here lies Bombastes, stout of heart and limb,
 Who conquered all but Fusbos—Fusbos him.

Among other distinctions, *Bombastes Furioso* can claim to have inspired James Robinson Planché, creator of nineteenth-century extravaganza, to his first effort, *Amoroso, King of Little Britain*, written originally for amateurs and presented at Drury Lane in 1818. "If a pun be a crime," Planché was a master of criminals. There were worse punsters to follow; but Planché started the whole school that kept the "sacred lamp of burlesque" continuously alight from the production of his *Olympic Revels*, at the now-vanished Olympic Theatre in 1831, to the 1895 revival of *Little Jack Sheppard*. This was the last flicker of the Gaiety

tradition to be immediately followed by the arrival of George Edwardes's invention of musical comedy, represented by *The Shop Girl*.

James Robinson Planché

Throughout his long life—he died in 1880 at the age of eighty-four years—Planché remained faithful and prolific. Among his rivals and successors were Gilbert a'Beckett, Mark Lemon, the future Sergeant Talfourd, Robert and William Brough, W. S. (afterwards Sir William) Gilbert, Albert Smith, Shirley Brooks, Tom Taylor, F. C. (afterwards Sir Francis) Burnand, H. J. Byron, and Robert Reece.

Thanks to these and others every conceivable subject in tragedy, opera, classical mythology, current melodrama, and children's fairy-tale found itself honoured at one or other of the half-dozen theatres where burlesque and extravaganza were a regular part of the bill of fare in Victorian days. The burlesques took all sorts of forms—some of the early ones were one-act inexpensive affairs included in a varied dramatic programme before or after the drama. When George Edwardes joined John Hollingshead at the Gaiety they began to be long three-act spectacles costing a fortune. But right to the finish the rhymed heroic verse and the pun were characteristics common to all.

About Victorian burlesque and extravaganza in its "palmy days" were certain merits which compare by no means unfavourably with the taste and tenour of much present-day entertainment. It was written by educated people mainly for educated people. It did not just harp stupidly upon physical sensations, or allow its concessions to ignorance to paralyse all fancy. Though it was thoroughly human, intelligent allusions were possible.

Pioneers

In his *Book of Burlesque*, Davenport Adams emphasizes this—

Modern burlesque was fortunate indeed in its founders—all of them men of letters as well as playwrights. . . . They

came fresh to the task and made the most of their opportunities. They set themselves really to travesty and to parody, and were careful to present, amid their wildest comicalities, a definite, intelligible story. They dropped naturally into the decasyllabic couplet, and made free use of the pun; but in neither case did they become mechanical or strained.

The verse of Planché and A'Beckett is smoothness itself, and they do not descend to word-torturing. Talfourd and the Brouchs took more licence in this respect; but they never sank to drivel. Above all, not one of these masters of burlesque permitted himself to be vulgar either in general treatment or in verbal detail. They were nice in their choice of subjects, and, like W. S. Gilbert in the case of *The Princess*, perverted them respectfully.

By way of example, here is a speech from Planché's second burlesque—*Olympic Devils*, a sequel to *Olympic Revels*—daring to treat of the Greek Fates with a wit and grace and cultured understanding quite outside the apparent scope of the average jazz-band crooner and "boobadoop" comedian now prevalent—

I vow you Fates are most industrious spinsters !
Miss Clotho there—man's destiny beginning—
Life's thread at tea, like a tee-totum, spinning.
And then Miss Lachesis that same thread measures,
Taking great pains, but giving little pleasures.
Last comes Miss Atropos, her part fulfilling,
And cuts poor mortals off without a shilling.
The saddest sister of the fatal three,
Daughter, indeed, of *shear* necessity !
Plying her awful task with due decorum,
A never-ceasing game of "snip-snap-snorum" !
For help—alas !—man pleads to her in vain—
Her motto's "Cut and never come again."

"Riquet with the Tuft"

Strangely enough, Planché's first big success in fairy extravaganza, *Riquet with the Tuft*—taken, like *Cinderella*, *Puss in Boots*, *Blue-Beard*, and *The Sleeping Beauty*, from old Perrault—is almost the only theme of his that has never been

repeated. Yet how charming a story it tells, of the ugly but witty prince and the beautiful but stupid princess, and of how the prince was suddenly transformed into a handsome man and the princess began to say clever and delightful things! According to Perrault's "moral," the transformation was due to the magic of love. There was no real alteration; but the prince suddenly appeared to be handsome and the princess's conversation to be engaging.

This would, of course, never do for extravaganza purposes. Charles Mathews's Riquet—not quite equal, according to Planché, to Potier's original, which he had seen in Paris—underwent a visible quick-change, while Madame Vestris's Princess Esmeralda burst out into gay and gracious observations. The production, which wound up with a tableau considered splendid at the time, "caught on." It was the prelude to twenty other fairy extravaganzas of Planché's devising. The reason why no modern adaptor has chosen this otherwise attractive subject to popular purpose may lie in the intense difficulty of being ostentatiously brilliant—as Riquet has to be, to atone for his unprepossessing looks—and at the same time of capturing the sympathies of the audience. We have not had many dramatists since Oscar Wilde who could accept this particular task with confidence.

Puns on Parade

Though it was Planché who started the habit of making the heroic verse a vehicle for puns, his comparatively mild efforts in this direction were soon outdone by his successors. Robert Reece was an especial expert in this tempting but in the end dangerous game of word-play. Excellent, like so many other ornaments, in the hands of a master, it soon becomes a boring obsession with smaller minds. To Shakespeare puns came so easily that he uses them instinctively just as grace-notes on serious occasions, without any humorous intention at all; as when Lady Macbeth says—

I'll gild the faces of the grooms withal,
That it may seem their guilt.

In the Victorian burlesques, what began as a light-hearted quip ended by becoming a laborious infliction. Even Robert Reece's worst derangements were nothing to the atrocities of H. J. Byron and Burnand.

Here are just a few, taken at random—

Fine horses those ! That leader came from Sestos,
Stands *fire* well, and so he counts *as best 'os*.

A couch that's made 'midst buttercups he's shy on;
The verdant sward how could a *dandy lie on*?

You jeer at Pallas 'cos she's strict and staid;
With all your railing you'll need *Pallas' aid*.

I am a lunatic for lack of thee !
Mad as a March hare—oh, *ma chère amie* !

Aeneas, son of Venus, sails the sea,
Mighty and *high* as *Venus' son* should be.

When quite a child, the blackest draught I'd drain,
And took my *pill -oh* ! on *account o' pain*;
And, as my youthful feathers all unfurled,
Seemed formed to make a *bold stir* in the world . . .
But suddenly the future seemed to frown,
Fortune gave me a quilt, and *I'd a down*.

Swindle the widow, the poor orphan do,
And then myself become an *off 'un*, too.

But soon I feel, with passion and disgust,
Within this *bosom* there will be a *bust*.

The wretched man sips at the draught now hated,
Unless, like me, he gets *a-man-sip-hated*.

My wits unstrung hang loose my head inside;
What should be Christmas feels like *wits-untied*.

Yesterday all was fair—a glorious Sunday—
But this *sick transit* spoils the *glory o' Monday*.

Sultan of Egypt, this pathetic tear
Proves you've one faithful vizier left—*viz. 'ere*.

His hair is cut so short where once it flowed;
'Tis a French crop, like grass—'tis *à la mowed*.

When first I married thee, then somewhat shady,
Oh, Adelaide! I thought I '*ad a lady*.

Pantomime Verse

One would have thought that more than fifty years of this kind of thing would have been enough, considering that the "heroic" for serious purposes lasted only fifteen. Not at all! The time was to come for burlesque and fairy extravaganza to be exiled from the year-round theatre. But, long before then, they had been transferred—"heroic" verse, puns, and all—to that strange but ever-delightful gallimaufry of traditions, the modern English pantomime. There even the verse, though somewhat battered, bids fair to outlive the harlequinade—that last relic of the old Italian *commedia*. Whoever else talks prose, the Demon King and the Fairy Queen remain true to the "heroic" and even to the pun.

Some people affect to shed rather pedantic tears over the dwindling to a shout and shower of crackers of the once prolonged exploits of Harlequin and Columbine, Clown and Pantaloon—not to mention the red-hot poker, the string of sausages and the baffled policeman, lingering from the days when Sir Robert Peel's replacing of the old watchmen was unpopular. But what is the use of keeping the outward shell when the spirit has gone? There can be no life without change.

Deburau

The history of pantomime has now been repeated so often that there is no need to revert to it at large here. Goldoni tells us how the "impromptu comedy" of Italy, pillaged by Shakespeare and Molière, became, in itself and in its own country, stale and wearisome, though Gozzi did his best to bring it back to life. We know how Rich at Covent Garden—our own harlequin of genius—turned it into a dumb-show mime with dazzling success. We know how Grimaldi, to whom I shall be referring again later, created a new tradition for clown. But when the original "Joey" was no more, his

hoarse guffaw, paint-slashed cheeks, and wedge-tufted hair again grew meaningless and tedious, as a ritual and make-up handed down to dull-witted automatons. We know how, meanwhile, Deburau, the once forlorn and wandering child-acrobat of Napoleon's army, tramped and starved through almost every country of Europe. Then he came to the little Funambules—the "Tight-Rope Theatre"—in Paris, and there created the entirely different clown that we have grown to love as Pierrot.

I myself happen to have paid tribute to Deburau in my book, *The Story of Pierrot*—

The night is darkest before the dawn. . . . Deburau was sitting in a neighbouring café—the Café de L'Ours—preparatory, so the story goes, to throwing himself into the Seine. As he sat there, he overheard a little group of out-at-heel young actors and scribblers in high argument upon the art of the theatre. They talked of Talma, of tragedy, of comedy, of genius, of the spell of passion. Deburau listened. Out of the ashes of his despair a new hope, a new determination rose and glowed within his soul. He also would be an actor! He would be tragedian, comedian: he, poor, despised Deburau, hissed from the stage where even dogs had won a cheer!

He would bring into his lowly labours the soul that had tried in vain to express itself upon the tight-rope and balanced ladder! This grinning, clumsy lout of a Pierrot he would make into a human character, touching the heart to tears as well as laughter. He would put his own sorrows into Pierrot, his own bitterness sweetened with sympathy. And they should laugh, too; yes, they should laugh! But it should be on Pierrot's side now—*with* him, not *at* him.

The New Pierrot

As it happened the little Tight-Rope Theatre was just at that time exactly ripe for Deburau's decision: . . . Short dumb-show pantomines had been stealthily introduced, unwillingly and on sufferance, as a sort of framework for feats of agility. . . . With them grew the new Pierrot. Discarding the old grin and horseplay, Deburau made him a natural, gentle, half-pathetic, half-humorous, wholly human figure,

pale and cadaverous, with a smile of silent raillery for ever flickering round his lips. It had its instant result upon the fortunes of the Funambules. Pierrot became the rage of Paris. Poets, critics, playwrights, artists, flocked to the tiny twopenny pit.

Through it all Deburau won the glory that he deserved. Despite his triumphs, his worldly fortunes remained blighted by poverty, sickness, and managerial tyranny. When all Paris was crowding to see him, he was giving six performances a day for thirty-five francs a week! His "dressing-room"—in reality a sort of earth-pit that had been dug out in making the foundations of the little theatre—continued to afford a favourably moist soil not only for mushrooms but for rheumatism and other ills. But his glory none could take from him. He was artist, creator. He—poor melancholy buffoon who could not win a smile upon the tight-rope—was among the immortals!

English Pantomime

Thus each nation to which the old Italian troupe wandered has made out of them the pantomime it deserved. Our own English pantomime—like our own English plum-pudding—has probably a more satisfying and varied set of ingredients than any. It is true that the spectacular "introduction" was introduced in the eighteenth century by Rich himself. The music-hall element, which came towards the end of the nineteenth, went far to swamping everything else for a while. But it would be difficult to gauge how much of its still-abiding popularity English pantomime owes to the burlesques and extravaganzas of Planché and his comrades—many of which were, it may be mentioned, produced at Christmas time.

It owes to them much besides the verse and the puns that still haunt the memory of young and old pantomime-goers. It owes partly to them the feminine "boys," of whom Madame Vestris was an admired example, and the actual treatment of many of the stories. H. J. Byron's burlesque of Rossini's opera is the basis of practically all present Cinderella

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pantomimes, with its development of Dandini—or, as the name used to be, Dandino. Byron was also the inventor of "the Widow Twankey," who has been for so long indispensable to every *Aladdin* pantomime. This sore-tried lady made her first appearance—at any rate under that name—in the burlesque of *Aladdin, or The Wonderful Scamp*, presented at the old Strand Theatre. She was played by James Rogers to the *Aladdin* of Marie Wilton, the future Lady Bancroft. Lady Bancroft says of Rogers in her autobiography—

There was no attempt to exaggerate in either dress or acting. When he entered, with a woe-begone face, and looked at the audience, nothing else was seen or heard for some seconds. But, however much Jimmy might provoke the audience to laughter, he would not be tempted to laugh himself.

### **Idealism**

Doubtless the time will come—as it has already with *Peter Pan*, *Alice in Wonderland*, *Bluebell*, *Where the Rainbow Ends*, and other children's plays—when new stories will challenge *Cinderella*, *Aladdin*, *Dick Whittington*, *The Babes in the Wood*, and the rest of the old favourites. But the new stories are only the old ones with a difference. From whatever part of the world they come, one finds that they soon grow to be of the English pantomime-pattern, alike in character and purpose. They take upon themselves its simple Christmas idealism of youth and faith and love triumphant, of good overcoming evil, and of beauty revealed in and round a human world of homely jollity and struggle and humour. Probably the "solar myth" is at the bottom of it all. As in the days of the Roman Saturnalia, the turning of the sun is a signal for general topsy-turveydom. The exchange of sex is part of this; but our old friend Phoebus Apollo is the last—as he was the first—"principal boy." He gives this annual assurance to rows of glowing faces that, though the dark days are here, summer is on the way.

Otherwise also, the more pantomime changes—and it is always changing—the more it remains the same thing. In



this it is like its own transformation-scenes. We bid good-bye to Columbine; but who else is Cinderella? The rough-and-tumble comedy that used to enliven the harlequinade can happen just as easily in the Widow Twankey's kitchen or Dame Durden's school. Whatever happens, the fact is unchallengable that the Christmas pantomime in England is more popular now than it ever has been. In its art it remains—and will probably remain—a festival-medley of almost all that has gone to the making of our imaginative theatre—tragedy, comedy, farce, melodrama, ballet, song, spectacle, burlesque, and extravaganza. There is no use in saying that it ought to be this or that; it must be everything.

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## CHAPTER XII

### CRITICISM AS A PROFESSION

**B**ETWEEN Kean and Irving—in England at any rate—dramatic criticism remained almost entirely dependent for anything that could be called inspiration upon the actor. As great acting itself was scarce, it followed that in these circumstances great criticism was scarcer still. Hardly a line lives on its own account. A host of biographies teem with theatrical anecdotes and descriptions of rowdy scenes in dingy playhouses, described by Sir Walter Scott as unfit for the presence of a decent woman. The “flashes of lightning” by which Shakespeare was read in Kean’s earlier and soberer performances gleamed all the more memorably through the intervening darkness.

There was always Macready; but, in spite of efforts to grade him more highly, he relapses into a respected, intelligent, cultured, and temperamental actor-manager, who consistently pursued high ideals both of art and of life in a baffling time. No critic has commanded the passionate homage of the world for anything he wrote about Macready’s acting, though Lewes’s account of the farewell banquet is a good bit of sentimental reporting. One suspects that Macready was more interesting as a man than as an actor. William Archer’s painstaking critical book about his career has not a tithe of the appeal of Macready’s own autobiography. Sir Theodore Martin’s monograph ends appropriately upon “an invitation to a dinner” at which “were several distinguished men of letters, to meet whom was a great satisfaction.” As Helen Faucit’s husband, Sir Theodore should have discovered the immortal part if it had been there.

But whatever he was not, Macready was a great missionary. He faced fierce adventures in America. He took Shakespeare to Paris in 1827, and inspired Alexandre Dumas

*père* to the beginning of the "romantic movement." He was a noble soul. Through all his conflicts he always, when at home, presided over family prayers—an example not, one fears, universally followed among actor-managers.

One actor of unmistakable genius there was of that period; but of him we have curiously little critical record. Grimaldi would have lived and died like any other clown, had not the public made him their own. So the autobiography to the editing of which Charles Dickens lent—or, rather, sold—his name had to be published. It was given life to by George Cruikshank's drawings. So far as Dickens is concerned he shows no sign of ever having seen Grimaldi. He devotes almost his entire preface to remembrances of having been to a pantomime in Richardson's Show as a child.

The regular critics are hardly any better. Leigh Hunt and Planché write pretty stuff about Harlequin and Columbine. They took poor Joey for granted. For the rest "we laughed ourselves hoarse," or "we lived our childhood over again" is considered good enough. Of Grimaldi's evidently remarkable performance in the tragic part of Orson in *Valentine and Orson* we can only guess between the lines of Dickens's *Life*—

The effect produced on the audience by his personation of this character was intense. . . . It was in Grimaldi's opinion the most difficult he ever had to play; the multitude of passions requiring to be portrayed and the rapid succession in which it was necessary to present them before the spectators involving an unusual share both of mental and physical exertion. . . . He would stagger off the stage into a small room behind the prompter's box, and there, sinking into an arm-chair, give full vent to the emotions which he found it impossible to suppress.

### **Bulwer Lytton**

The dramatists of the period failed to find any critic to write about them inspiringly. Douglas Jerrold's *Black-Eyed*

*Susan* and sparkling comedies had to make their own fame. Bulwer Lytton even now lives mainly in satire. The study of him given by M. Augustin Filon, the French critic, in his book upon *The English Stage*, has an attractive candour—

Bulwer passed himself off as a *grand seigneur* and a genius. He was really but a clever man and a dandy, who exploited literature for his social advancement. He affected a lofty originality. . . . When at last it was discovered that his sublimity was a spurious sublimity, that his history was false history, his "middle ages" bric-a-brac, his poetry mere rhetoric, his democracy a farce, his human heart a heart that had never beat in a man's breast, his books mere windy bladders—why, it was too late. The game had been played successfully and was over—the squireen of Knebworth, the self-styled descendant of the Vikings, had founded a family and hooked a peerage.

Grossly unfair as much of this is, where it is true it is refreshing for the time and place. But it is always to be remembered in Lytton's favour that to him more than any one else was due the great change that was to be the making of modern criticism in England as also of modern English drama. This was the freeing of the theatres from the old patent monopoly by the Theatres Act of 1843.

With twenty theatres arriving within a generation where there had been only three and some unsanctioned entertainments, dramatic criticism soon became very nearly, if not quite, a whole-time profession. Among other things, the freeing of the theatres made Samuel Phelps's productions of Shakespeare possible at Sadlers Wells, haunted by the young clerk from Old Broad Street who was to become Henry Irving, and also by a young Civil Servant, named Clement Scott.

### Victor Hugo

Meanwhile, a much more vigorous state of affairs was in evidence in France. There the "romantic revival" which followed Macready's visit with Shakespeare was giving the

pens of critics and of dramatists—and of several who were both at once—plenty of exercise. Alexandre Dumas *père* and Alfred de Vigny, Victor Hugo, and Alfred de Musset—they were at least worth battling for or against. In regard to Victor Hugo and the extent of his influence upon the future, A. B. Walkley has some illuminating things to say in his essay on *Modern English and French Drama*—

Victor Hugo's plays . . . belong to the old drama of rhetoric. Every one of them is based upon an antithesis—a king at odds with a bandit, a queen enamoured of a lackey, a court fool turned tragic protagonist—and antithesis is a figure of rhetoric. Rhetoric, the monologue of Charles Quint before the tomb of Charlemagne. Rhetoric, the *scène des portraits*. Rhetoric, the address of Ruy Blas to the ministers. That grotesque document, the preface to *Cromwell*, so far as it had any intelligible meaning whatever, meant a rhetorical dramaturgy. The author of *Hernani* was not the first of the modern dramatists; he was the last of the rhetoricians. So much was written about the excitement over the *première* of *Hernani*, to say nothing of Gautier's red waistcoat, that at last the public was fooled into believing there must be something in it.

## Rachel

In spite of the romantic hurly-burly, classicism was by no means done with either at the *Comédie Française* or elsewhere. The tragic intensity of Rachel in Racine and Corneille stirred George Henry Lewes to some fine critical prose—

Rachel was the panther of the stage; with a panther's terrible beauty and undulating grace she moved and stood, glared and sprang. There always seemed something not human about her. She seemed made of different clay from her fellows—beautiful but not lovable. Those who never saw Edmund Kean may form a very good conception of him if they have seen Rachel. She was very much as a woman what he was as a man. If he was a lion, she was a panther.

Her range, like Kean's, was very limited; but her expression was perfect within that range. Scorn, triumph, rage, lust and merciless malignity she could represent in symbols of irresistible power; but she had little tenderness, no womanly, caressing

softness, no gaiety, no heartiness. She was so graceful and so powerful that her air of dignity was incomparable; but somehow you always felt in her presence an indefinable suggestion of latent wickedness. . . .

The finest of her performances was *Phèdre*. Nothing I have ever seen surpassed this picture of a soul torn by the conflicts of incestuous passion and struggling conscience; the unutterable mournfulness of her look and tone as she recognised the guilt of her desires, yet felt herself so possessed by them that escape was impossible, are things never to be forgotten.

### **French Influence**

How little some of the English critics of the pre-Victorian period were in touch with what was happening outside the little round of Drury Lane, Covent Garden, and the Haymarket may be gathered from the fact that in 1831 Leigh Hunt criticized favourably an adaptation of Victor Hugo's *Hernani*, without knowing the name of the author or what was then regarded as the "epoch-marking" importance of the play in dramatic history.

This was soon to be altered. For at least thirty years—both before and after the coming of Boucicault's Irish dramas and of T. W. Robertson, himself enormously indebted to French example—the London stage was to be almost completely swamped with adaptations and translations from the French, stolen often without scruple or acknowledgment. To be thoroughly at home with Scribe and Legouv  , Ohnet, Labiche, and Sardou was the one essential to a conscientious critic of the eighteen-forties and 'fifties—above all if, as generally happened, he was himself a hack-translator.

### **A Poor Time for Critics**

It may be that the theatre took time to realize what its new-born freedom meant. The new playhouses that were cropping up, like the Princess's—where Charles Kean was to honour Shakespeare during the 'fifties with his "archaeological" revivals—the Strand, St. James's, and the Royalty, needed ready material. A French play translated overnight

served the turn. John Oxenford of *The Times* is said to have been reproved by Delane for the number of letters received about the theatre—"a matter of no interest to anybody." It was a poor time for critics. Who could wish to be engaged in writing non-committal notices of the dreary rubbish of Falconer and Fitzball, counting it a great thing to be able to "spot" the Parisian source of some nasty farce or gory melodrama of the moment?

One cannot claim that, when the revival did come with Robertson in the 'sixties and Irving in the 'seventies, the critics had done much towards it. Robertson himself had been a critic of sorts; but it is clear from the journalistic tone represented by the "Owls" in his play, *Society*, that he was not too proud of this. Drink and interminable talk and the borrowing of shillings in "Bohemian" resorts were among the credentials outwardly observed. Nor did the critics of the time do anything in particular to help Irving until he had helped himself. The provincial papers watched his progress for the most part with kindly but candid interest.

### **An Irving Prophecy**

Nothing like a prophecy arrived till he had already made a hit in London at the St. James's as Rawdon Scudamore in *Hunted Down*. When the company went on tour in *Meg's Diversion*, the *Liverpool Daily Post*, to which Irving's friend, Sir Edward Russell, then on the *Morning Star*, was afterwards to return as editor, came out with this—

Mr. Irving's representation was a strong confirmation of our opinion that he is one of the few great actors on the stage. Not that his performance had any greatness in it; but for the reason that he succeeded in making it as remarkable an assumption as the limited area created by the dramatist would allow. He seemed superior to his part, and it would be difficult to drive away the impression that there is no rôle superior to him.

It rather looks as though Sir Edward had sent along a hint from town. Just six months before, at the St. James's itself,



George Henry Lewes, sitting with "George Eliot," had said to her, "That young man will soon be at the head of the English stage," and she had answered, "I think he is there already."

The avalanche of praise that came from forty-one London newspapers after Irving's triumph in *The Bells* did not, after all, bespeak much originality, courage, or creative power in any one else but Irving. Afterwards, it was comparatively easy to discuss at length what all London was already talking about. As a matter of fact, the assembly of critical impressions does not give to posterity a very clear notion of Irving's Hamlet, which I did not see, as he stopped playing it in the 'eighties. According to Clement Scott it was a realization of Hazlitt's idea of a Hamlet who "thinks aloud." According to Sir Edward Russell, in what was surely the longest criticism ever printed by a daily paper, it was a Hamlet who "aggravated his own excitements."

### **"Passion, my boy!"**

For me—taking for granted Irving's imaginative power—I find two casual conversational phrases more enlightening than anything I have read in print. They were used by two utterly different people. One was Bram Stoker, who told me that the great thing that impressed him about Irving's Hamlet was not its intellectual quality, but "Passion, my boy, passion!" The other was Walkley, who said that what he chiefly recalled was the way Irving's Hamlet "nagged Ophelia." There must have been some profoundly individual treatment of Hamlet's disillusionment over Ophelia's character, which Irving was able to give with full force at first, but which afterwards grew stale and artificial. This may be one reason why he stopped playing Hamlet so early.

Certainly Irving did much to make dramatic criticism worth doing—his productions at the Lyceum were the first for a long while over which even the average dramatic critic was allowed to turn the column. Yet the critics as a body do not shine in relation to him. Scott slashed at his Richelieu

quite unfairly and at enormous length. He said he expected a "great" performance, and found it picturesque and intelligent, but dull. To what extent the play, which is at best a trashy piece of trickery, may have been to blame he did not say. As he was only a young man of twenty-eight at the time, it is possible that he did not know.

### **"The Fashionable Tragedian"**

The libel-action over the address *To a Fashionable Tragedian* published in *Fun* in 1875 was not only justified in court with apologies offered to Irving, but might have been taken up by the critics. With all their faults, they can hardly have been what the address describes them. It says—

With the hireling portion of the Press at your command, you have induced the vulgar and unthinking to consider you a model of histrionic ability and the pioneer of an intellectual and cultured school of dramatic art. . . . Elevate the drama, forsooth! You have canonized the cut-throat, you have anointed the assassin. Be content with the ghostly train of butchers you have foisted on public attention and let your next venture, at least, be innocent of slaughter. If your performance of Othello be trumpeted to the four winds of heaven by the gang of time-serving reporters in your employ, you will increase the epidemic of wife-murder one hundred-fold and degrade the national drama a further degree towards the level of the Penny Dreadful.

The title of "The Fashionable Tragedian" was to be used two years later for an equally regrettable but less personal attack in which William Archer, of all people, then a young fellow of twenty-one—was concerned as part-author. It was published when Irving was going on a tour of the principal provincial cities, and a stack of copies was sent to be sold in each town during the week of Irving's visit. It described him as "one of the worst actors that ever trod the British stage," his Hamlet as "a weak-minded puppy," his Macbeth as a "Uriah Heep in chain-armour," his Othello

as an "infuriated Sepoy," and his Richard as a "cheap Mephistopheles."

### Irving and Critics

It says an infinite deal for Irving's tolerance that he made no complaint whatever about this pamphlet. Archer told me that, although he had a good deal to do with Irving after that, Irving never allowed himself to appear conscious of this youthful indiscretion on the part of one who was to prove the most honourable and respected dramatic critic of his time. In the same way, Joseph Knight attacked Irving's Macbeth remorselessly in *The Athenaeum*, saying "his slow pronunciation and his indescribable elongation of syllables bring the whole, occasionally, near burlesque." Yet Irving remained to the end a staunch friend of that fine scholar, whom he knew to be quite incapable of being moved by malice. Indeed, it was Irving who was ultimately to take the chair at a farewell banquet given to Joseph Knight by actors and actresses on his retirement.

Of course there was an immense deal of truth in all that was said about Irving's mannerisms. Sometimes he was quite unintelligible—and the chuckle and trailing gait were always there. But so was the greatness. The saintly dignity of his Becket, the arch-roguery of his Mephistopheles, the sublimated irony of his Shylock, the ghastly horror of his Mathias, of his Dubosc in *The Lyons Mail*, and of his death-scene in *Louis XI*, and the rich, crusted comedy of his Gregory Brewster in *Waterloo*—all these were products of the stage-nurtured imagination and indomitable will of the man himself. He made one feel the adventure of life by presenting the extremes of villainy and virtue and idealizing both with the power and charm of his personality, itself born of the same imagination and will.

### Nature or Mask?

From a critical point of view, Irving's art was peculiarly valuable because it was a standing refutation of the very

false adage that "all great acting is a return to nature." Irving's acting was never a return to nature. The imaginative mask was never cast off. His social self was an acted "creation" just like the others. The rarely-revealed man behind was the Somerset boy who became a City clerk and had been a struggling provincial actor, playing the policeman in a pantomime, when those who were glad to be considered his equals were at the University or being dandled into a learned profession. Irving's "natural" language was the West-country speech—to which he would sometimes recur, but only among his most intimate cronies.

At the same time Irving's imagination reached from Becket to Dubosc—he was Becket and he was Dubosc, and Hamlet, Mephistopheles, and Gregory Brewster, and all the rest, and absolutely sincere in each character. His own private affairs and idiosyncrasies may have been used—as every good actor uses every idea or emotion or atom of nervous energy he can summon up—in the creation of a part. To him nature was just a help or hindrance to imagination. The attempt to distinguish between "character-parts" and "straight" parts was flouted once and for all at the old Lyceum. Irving was all his characters; but none of them was he.

### **Clement Scott**

With the establishment of Irving on his throne the old-fashioned English dramatic critic, who for me will always be typified by Clement Scott, was in the splendour of his power. I began my London playgoing towards the end of the 'eighties, and can vouch for the genuine good that Scott did to the box-office by writing in a vein of almost lyrical enthusiasm of actors and actresses—and getting it into to-morrow morning's paper. He could turn out his column-and-a-bit in an hour—which, as I know from experience, takes some doing—and could see that nothing pertinent was missed out.

His was always a "full-dress" notice. He dealt with the

play act by act and told the story, and gave picturesque impressions of the production as such. If he did not like the play, he slashed at it with such fury as to make people want to see it all the more. But he never sneered. He never turned out the tame, half-hearted, tired, and hurried quarter of a column that has all too often to do justice for dramatic criticism in these days of fierce competition and early publishing, when every line after eleven o'clock has to be fought for. He never left one in any doubt as to whether he thought the play worth going to or not; and he had a faculty of finding all sorts of reasons—sometimes quite low down in the cast—why the answer should be in the affirmative.

Scott's reward was abundant. The velvet-collared cape, the flower in the button-hole, the special box, Lord Burnham's private carriage, the homage of pit and gallery—all were there. The time was lenient to his deficiencies. The problem play had not arrived. Pinero was turning from farces for Mrs. John Wood at the Court to charming a London of tinkling hansoms with *Sweet Lavender*. Even *The Profligate* was provided with an alternative ending for those who wanted just apple-blossoms.

Moreover, the theatre was rich. It had no rivals. Thanks to Irving and the Bancrofts, Gilbert-and-Sullivan opera, the Kendals and John Hare, Hawtrey and Tree and others, a huge new, educated public were being attracted. The price of stalls had gone up in the West End, and tours were royal progresses. The actor-managers were making—and some of them squandering—fortunes. Since the great adventure of Bernhardt and the *Comédie Française* company at the Gaiety in 1879, hardly a season passed without the now "divine" Sarah paying London a visit. Scott was not of a nature to discuss profoundly the psychology of *Phèdre*; but he could always veer off to glamour and the *voix d'or*. On the other hand he could revel in Sardou and Adelphi-and-Princess's melodrama, and all the farces between *Our Boys* and *Charley's Aunt*. He helped to the last to feed "the sacred lamp" of burlesque; and regularly every Christmas

he not only informed but convinced us that Sir Augustus Harris had "surpassed himself" in the Drury Lane pantomime.

### **The Impact of Ibsen**

Then came the impact of Ibsen, the arrival of the new criticism with Archer, Walkley, Shaw, and Grein, and the beginning of the end of Scott's empire, which was to crumple up finally with that ill-timed interview in *Great Thoughts* upon the morality of the stage. At this distance of time it is inconceivable that any critic of Scott's experience should have written such arrant rubbish as he did about *Ghosts*, so gallantly presented by one critic, J. T. Grein, at the inspiration of another, William Archer—

An open drain; a loathsome sore unbandaged; a dirty act done publicly; a lazar-house with all its doors and windows open. . . . Candid foulness. . . . Kotzebue turned bestial and cynical. Offensive cynicism. . . . Ibsen's melancholy and malodorous world. . . . Absolutely loathsome and fetid. . . . Gross, almost putrid indecorum.

### **Shakespeare, Byron, and Browning**

This was bad enough as coming from a critic who made no bones about incestuous classics and went into raptures over salacious Palais-Royal farce; but it was crowned by his sage conclusion—

It might have been a tragedy had it been treated by a man of genius. Handled by an egotist and a bungler, it is only a deplorably dull play. There are ideas in *Ghosts* that would have inspired a tragic poet. They are vulgarized and debased by the suburban Ibsen. You want a Shakespeare, or a Byron, or a Browning to attack the subject-matter of *Ghosts* as it ought to be attacked.

"This critic's literary judgment," Mr. Archer slyly and cogently adds in his introduction to his own edition of the play, "may be measured by his bracketing Shakespeare, Byron, and Browning as master-dramatists!"

My own feeling is that it was not sheer stupidity on Clement Scott's part. I used to sit next him pretty frequently when he was deposed to a mere seat in the stalls, and I did not find him a stupid man. He was just highly emotional and "boiled at a low temperature." He had found it did not pay a dramatic critic of those days to go deep. Also he did rightly gauge the feelings of a very great many of his Victorian colleagues and fellow playgoers, whose attitude was that you can treat vice attractively and set it to music but must on no account warn people of its evil effects.

It was the old antagonism—not here of the Puritan mind to the theatre, but of the theatre to the Puritan mind. Forty years on, when the Vicar of Buxton considered the play "hardly one for a festival," the fiery Clement found at least one sympathizer. The whole thing really meant that, in spite of Queen Victoria and all she stood for, the theatre was in some phases still the Temple of Venus in Clement Scott's day. Any of the old Plautine naughtinesses could be allowed, so long as they were laughed over; but not a word against the goddess!

### Professional Critics

By the 'nineties dramatic criticism in London had undoubtedly become something like a small profession, though it still had to be eked out for the most part with other occupations. Scott made a good salary and lived in Woburn Square; but Walkley had to work all day in the General Post Office. Bendall—a future Censor—was also in the Civil Service; Nisbet of *The Times* was editor of one of the first halfpenny papers, *The Morning*, and was also writer of the philosophic *Handbook* of the old *Referee*; Spencer Wilkinson, leader-writer and expert in military history, was representing *The Morning Post* when I first joined the confraternity. He was soon to be replaced by G. E. Morrison, who was a barrister, as was E. F. Spence (afterwards K.C.) of the *Westminster Gazette*. Grein spent his days in Mincing Lane. Joseph Knight was editor of *Notes and Queries*. Most

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of the others filled up with book-reviewing and other newspaper work.

### William Archer

Apart from Scott there was just one critic who, though called to the Bar, and with abilities that would easily have brought him a competence there, set himself from the first to be a dramatic critic and nothing else, and to give dramatic criticism professional dignity and distinction on its own account. This was William Archer. It was undoubtedly his work not only for Ibsen but for the intelligent playgoer in general that attracted me to the theatre—and how many others! I used to read his articles in *The World* and recognize that this new movement in the theatre was something that was already proving worth the devotion of a man of wide culture, insight, sincerity, and charm—something different from the barren party politics of that day, which seemed the only alternative; a bright adventure, in happy contrast to the drab repressions of the *fin-de-siècle* Victorian world. Afterwards I came to know Archer pretty well, and was always conscious of the sacrifice his faith in the theatre must have entailed to this able, strong-minded Scandinavian-Scot. It meant having to write about rattle-trap farces and musical comedies in which he took not the remotest interest.

In some ways, no man could be imagined less temperamentally suited to the work of dramatic criticism. But behind all his gaunt denials he had something of Ibsen's own passion for "the place of light and sound," and a whimsical humour of his own. Perhaps the Scandinavian strain in his blood answered for much. In the irony of things, the success of his melodrama, *The Green Goddess*, which outraged nearly all the rules he himself had laid down in his book on *Playmaking*, came too late to bring him the satisfaction it should. A remarkable thing is that he did not plan *The Green Goddess* as a melodrama, and was much annoyed at hearing it compared with Dion Boucicault's *Jessie Brown*, or *The Relief of Lucknow*. He looked upon it as a philosophical phantasy. The Rajah—



so admirably played by George Arliss—was supposed to some extent to represent his own last word upon things in general.

Out of dramatic criticism Archer can never have made much. He got £10 a week for his articles in *The World*, which was £2 more than Shaw was making on the *Saturday Review* and more than three times as much as some other critics were getting. But even so, what a pittance for a man of his capacity—the honoured leader of his calling and a master of the language and literature of at least four Continental countries, let alone his own !

### A. B. Walkley

Walkley was in almost every respect the antithesis of Archer. The lighter the thought with Archer, the more laborious the process. His mind, compared with Walkley's, was like the old clock at the Royal College of Science, which has some business to go through before it strikes the hour. With Walkley the apt allusion—from Boswell or Pickwick, Balzac or Sainte-Beuve—came with ease and immediacy. He was much less recondite than his cleverness led most people to think. His chief skill was in the grace he could put into small compass. The longer Walkley's article, the more danger there was of his revealing that he was not bursting with any great message. Some of his little paragraphs as "Spec" in *The Star* were much finer gems than his later columns in *The Times*. He was a master of happy incidentals—of things like a visit of Sir Roger de Coverley to Stonecutter Street, done in the style of Steele, and a musical criticism he once wrote in place of Shaw, signed "Bono di Corsetto." I always used to feel that he could have lived very contentedly in the eighteenth century, but was prepared to accept anything else that the nineteenth or this could give.

So far as the theatre was concerned, he was a confessed opportunist. He could never have been the big gun in a campaign, as Archer was over Ibsen. It was enough for him

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that Coquelin and Bernhardt, Duse and Réjane turned up in the course of a season. If nothing else offered he would go to a music-hall and be remarkably entertaining over that. He was exactly fitted for the theatre. He knew—and told—all its secrets without having to ask; but he never cared about it with Archer's profound passion. With him it was lucrative recreation. His real delights were reading and music—he was an excellent pianist. How he found time for it all with his immensely important work at the Post Office is not so much a mystery as just a miracle, like his classical prowess at Oxford on a mathematical scholarship.

### Shaw as Critic

Though Shaw dazzled everybody—as he openly intended to do—with those two years of brilliance on the *Saturday Review*, he was not, we also know, moved to it by any love of dramatic criticism. He had already won fame but not fortune as a dramatist. Why *Arms and the Man* was not a commercial success from the first is one of those things “no fella can understand.” There it was—a masterpiece of comedy, still in some ways his best and brightest play, full of colour and fresh character, and without anything in it that could offend the most virginal Victorian maid. It had an excellent reception, apart from the gallery voice with which Shaw so sportingly agreed—“But what are we two against so many?” Yet there was “nothing doing.” It is pleasant to believe that if half so good a play were to turn up now its saga would be very different. No wonder Shaw determined to make a new reputation at all costs, and let the world know of him by the time his next play came along! So the *Saturday Review* criticisms were launched and did their work—and what joyous reading they are still, in every kind, from *Boiled Heroine* to *Dear Harp of My Country*! As part of the inspiring biography of the greatest contemporary man of the theatre, with the heart of Dickens and the wit of Molière—and as literature in themselves—they will assuredly live.

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## Escapade

Whether they did unmixed good to criticism as a profession is another matter. As infallible judgments it would be an insult to Shaw to take them too seriously. He has told us often enough the real reason why he went for Shakespeare. His reluctance to give Irving full credit for that magnificent performance as Gregory Brewster needs no explanation. Speaking personally, I should be prepared to forgive Shaw anything he likes to say or do, whether as critic or as dramatist or as writer of "costume-debates." But not the next man—and that is the trouble. The success of Shaw's escapade as a dramatic critic has undoubtedly encouraged smaller people, without his qualifications or excuse, to get notoriety by reckless abuse.

Shaw himself had, as I have special reason to know, no illusions about his critical experiences. I remember talking to him at that time in his little eyrie at the top of his mother's house in Fitzroy Square where I had called on him as a young cub from the country, with no introduction or right to be there at all. The subject was not his own greatness, but my welfare. He warned me earnestly against going in for criticism of any kind as a profession. He had, he said, tried it in art, in music, and in drama, and it just did not pay. How wise the advice was, and how useless!

## J. T. Grein

Again in complete contrast was J. T. Grein, founder of the Independent Theatre, and the actual "presenter" not only of *Ghosts* but of Shaw's first play—or rather the play that Shaw and Archer wrote together—*Widowers' Houses*. Though not easily rivalled where a flair for acting, an all-embracing knowledge of the European drama, and a faculty for sustained hyperbole were concerned, Grein was at his greatest as a critic in deeds rather than words. Mr. Conal O'Riordan has put it very well in his foreword to "Michael Orme's" biography of her indomitable husband—

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He came as a simple man who did things, into a crowd of subtle men who talked and scribbled, and scribbled and talked, without producing any effect whatever except more talk and more scribbling. He ended by hearing Shaw say, and say truly, that he had changed the whole nature of the British theatre and changed it for the better. It had been born again in his hands.

Only those who, like myself, came into practical touch with Grein's spirit of buoyant and tireless enthusiasm for anything that could help the theatre or his fellow-critics can realize what a loss his death meant to both. His readiness, his eagerness, his friendliness, his unquenchable optimism and sheer joy in any genuine endeavour for the good of art or of humanity have not left even a far-off likeness. He was not always wise and suffered tragically for some of his mistakes. But his resilience and the *panache* that he never lost were triumphant. In my association with him over the founding of the Critics' Circle I soon came to recognize his pluck and initiative and complete unselfishness; and his personal charm and gaiety were a perpetual refreshment.

His command of half a dozen languages—I remember his taking up Spanish late in life just by way of keeping his mind in trim—was of untold value. He was the only London critic who could respond adequately to Cavaliero Grasso in his own language, when we gave the Sicilian Players a supper, and that fine actor wanted—to our consternation—to kiss us all. In Canada, Grein's visit two years before his death to judge in the contest of amateur clubs at Lord Bessborough's invitation was a major event in the theatrical history of the Dominion. When it was discovered that he could talk French just as fluently as English—if not more so—the joy of the French-Canadians knew no bounds. It is to be doubted if any critic who ever lived faced worse odds than J. T. Grein, or fought a braver fight against undeserved opprobrium, or was, in the end, more universally and rightly beloved.

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### Pioneers of Criticism

These four men were the pioneers of modern dramatic criticism in England. Their friendship has been for me a privilege worth many sacrifices. They all of them extended to me as a young man kindnesses and expressions of comradeship which amaze me all the more as the years go by, and the "hungry generations" succeed each other. What of the present—and the future? From the professional standpoint, one must confess, dramatic criticism is not even what it was. The number of London daily and evening papers has dwindled from eighteen to twelve. Even in those that are left, dramatic criticism is accorded on an average less than a quarter of the space it used to claim. As Bernard Shaw avowed in that talk of nearly fifty years ago, dramatic criticism does not "pay" on anything like a professional scale. Out of the twelve daily-and-evening critics certainly not more than six receive, as critics, more than the salary of a suburban or provincial bank-manager. The minimum weekly-paper payment is beneath the trade-union wage of an agricultural labourer.

### Critic-Dramatists

In these circumstances it is not surprising that nearly every dramatic critic has other irons in the fire. My old colleague, St. John Ervine—whose friendly tribute to me at a certain "testimonial dinner" I shall not forget—must make far more out of his plays than out of all the criticisms and articles he has written. James Agate, who also did me a much-appreciated honour on the same occasion, distributes his "ego" to the world of books as well as to that of the theatre. He, too, has written plays. Charles Morgan, Ivor Brown, and W. A. Darlington are novelists and—all three of them—dramatists also. Sydney Carroll, as a manager, has been responsible for some of the most memorable and beautiful productions of our time. A. E. Wilson and Willson Disher have both some excellent books to their credit. Ashley Dukes is both dramatist and manager. In each

capacity—with his own *The Man With A Load of Mischief* and T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*—he has put us for ever in his debt.

In spite of its small emoluments, dramatic criticism has a far larger sphere of interest than it had when I started as critic for the long vanished *Morning Leader* in the year of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. All sorts of new territories have been added. Apart from Ibsen and Sudermann, the sources of new creation were forty years ago almost limited to London and Paris. Duse had for a long while to appear in Bernhardt parts utterly unsuited to her, making a good angel of *Fédora* and a saint of *Marguerite Gautier*. Afterwards she was to lend Italian souls for a change to those thorough northerners, *Magda* and *Hedda Gabler*. True, there were some lovely reversions to native character in D'Annunzio's *La Gioconda* and *Francesca da Rimini* and Goldoni's *La Locandiera*.

### “Cyrano de Bergerac”

Coquelin burst upon us with *Cyrano de Bergerac*—how well I remember that first night at the old Lyceum, with George Meredith being taken into his box in an invalid chair! But Rostand was a reaction—or, shall one say, a flowering from the old stem of romantic rhetoric. America was sending over old-homestead melodrama of the “Alabama” type, and putting a new vigour into musical comedy with *The Belle of New York*. On the other hand it was giving us nothing to compare with Eugene O'Neill, Maxwell Anderson, Elmer Rice, George Kaufman, or Marc Connelly.

Thanks to Grein, we had some memorable seasons of German plays, with Hans Andersen and Else Gademann doing everything possible to win our hearts for Hauptmann. Somehow we never took to Gerhart—nor he to us. To the surprise of everybody—some critics included—it was the unabashed sentiment of Foerster's *Alt Heidelberg* that caught the favour of the British public—and then only when George Alexander snapped it up.

How infinitely larger a horizon opens out before the present-day critic and the present-day playgoer! It is true that Germany and Italy do not happen for the moment to be prolific of new and acceptable ideas in drama. Pirandello has come and gone. But a world of playcraft and stagecraft hitherto ignored has been revealed in the Russian plays—not only Chekhov, but Gogol and Tolstoi and Dostoevski and a whole dramatic literature. Constantin Stanislavski's last admirable book, *The Actor Prepares*, has still much to teach us of the psychological intimacy aimed at and achieved by the Moscow Art Theatre. Whether the new Soviet mass-theatres prove equally fruitful remains to be seen. I rather doubt it.

### Federal Theatre

A new spirit is stirring in Oriental drama. Tagore's plays have expressed very beautifully some not-unchanging phases of Indian thought and emotion. Among his disciples time must find a successor. Both in China and Japan signs have not been wanting, when other activities have made it possible, of the arrival of modern drama welded of old romantic traditions and new social ideals. America is becoming theatre-conscious—more, perhaps, than Hollywood approves. One cannot ignore the success of the Federal Theatre movement—subsidized by the Government on behalf of out-of-work actors—with its expressionistic industry plays and its "Living Newspaper." This type of drama may not prove quite so formidable a rival to more deeply-imagined creation as some think. It seems to me a hurried growth, and, possibly, from barren soil. But it all means new life, new interest, new material for criticism.

In Great Britain itself the critical outlook is, at least, more inspiring than it was in my early days, when the touring of London successes and London actor-managers was almost as monotonous a purse-filling routine as the present-day exploitation of a film. The very struggles of the provincial theatre make helpful criticism all the more

valuable. Every town with a repertory theatre—and there are a growing number of them—is a possible centre for genuine creative work. It is by no means always a paying proposition; but it is none the less worth doing for that. Lessing got the equivalent of £120 a year as critic-in-ordinary to the Hamburg theatre, and the venture was a failure. But his *Hamburg Dramaturgy* is still a classic. Nobody was out to make much money over the founding of Dublin's Abbey Theatre, which has given us an unrivalled procession of genius, from Yeats and Synge to Sean O'Casey.

### Provincial Repertory

In a good many of our provincial cities it does undoubtedly break one's heart to see how the individuality is going. To each there is nowadays a veneer of sameness—the same chromium-plated fronts of the same multiple-shops, the inevitable mammoth cinemas all showing the same films, the same lights on the same motor-roads. All that seems to be left even of some of our most endeared county-towns are a few tumble-down houses in back streets, a cathedral or parish church, and the old Theatre Royal, used sometimes as a second-class film-house. But I believe this is only superficial. I believe that underneath there nearly always does exist a character and humanity and home-love that demand something more than mechanical mass-expression. Even there, in little halls and upper-rooms, with companies of amateurs or valiant young professionals working "like demons" for next to nothing, the living drama is being born again.

The history of the Liverpool Playhouse, of the Norwich Maddermarket, and of repertory-enterprises like those at Birmingham, York, Coventry, and Bristol, serve to show what can be done when high purpose and sincere enthusiasm and wise conduct combine. The immense growth of the amateur movement is another proof that the art of the theatre is a natural outcrop of the human spirit. Everywhere the dramatist, actor, and critic has each his work to



do in fostering the three essentials—play, performance, and audience.

In the West End, with its crowd of theatres serving an eight-million population, the labours of the dwindled company of dramatic critics are far more arduous than they were. Instead of writing at leisure long notices of two or three new plays a week, they have to write five or six short ones in much more trying circumstances. It is a labour only occasionally rewarded with the arrival of a play that it is an unmixed delight to see and praise. On the whole, the commercial managers as a body do keep the theatre of intelligence going in the face sometimes of staggering losses. The spoken drama has survived the challenge of ballet and spectacle—both on and off the ice—as it did that of the film and broadcasting.

### **National Theatre**

At the same time I certainly feel that criticism would benefit by some such organization as the National Theatre. I conceive it, like the *Comédie Française*, not only as an august home of tradition, but as a nursery of new ideas and new hopes for the classics of the future. In the circumstances I have outlined, the wonder is that English journalism should have produced so many good critics. Even in the days of Sarcey and Lemaître no one would suggest that the critical corps of Paris outshone the more haphazard assemblage of the London theatres. But I believe strongly that a repertory theatre in London of the highest class, with something of an official sanction and support, would give the drama—and criticism with it—a dignity and standing that both have lacked.

### **“ Popular Entertainment ”**

All through my critical career I have been oppressed with the assumption—a true one, doubtless, from a commercial point of view—that the theatre is just a “place of entertainment.” I have been told that I must judge plays, for

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newspaper purposes, primarily, if not solely, by their "entertainment value." From this compulsion I am happy now to be free. I would not go so far, perhaps, as did my friend, the late Henry Arthur Jones, in his book, *The Foundations of National Drama*. He sets down there, as one of his "corner stones"—

The severance of the drama from popular entertainment: the recognition of it as a fine art which, though its lowest ranges must always compound with mere popular entertainment, and be confused with it, is yet essentially something different, transcends it, and in its higher ranges is in marked and eternal antagonism to popular entertainment.

My own feeling is that the word "popular" is wrong in this connexion. I am sure that what the author of *The Silver King* really means is just weak concession to the stupid and the sensual. But this is by no means always "popular." The most degrading productions that I have seen have been exclusive and expensive luxury-shows for "tired business men." In his main contention Jones was right enough. The establishment of a National Theatre would supply one theatre, at any rate, where plays could be criticized without fear or favour by the highest standard. Those criticisms would be far more worth reading than the extravagant but patronizing praise given, for instance, to the sometimes not wholly satisfying productions at the Old Vic, with reservations that better was not to be expected at a "people's theatre."

### Scholars and Critics

One effect upon criticism that would, I think, result from the establishment of a National Theatre in London would be a closer approach between scholars and workaday critics. The *Comédie Française* has always afforded this link between the academic and the commercial theatre, which is good for both. In America it has been more happily spanned than here. Critics like Brooks Atkinson, George Jean Nathan, and John Mason Brown are nearer to the world of Brander

Matthews and Professor Baker than most of Fleet Street is to that of Dr. Pollard or Sir Edmund Chambers. Also it would help the education of younger critics in the right playing of Shakespeare and to the best and most faithful compromise in modern production. As it is, the temptation to "stunts" on the part of ambitious and hurried producers anxious for notoriety tends to be encouraged by young critics who cannot make comparisons with what they have not seen.

The site for the National Theatre in South Kensington seemed to me from the first well chosen. It happens to be just about half-way between two theatres to which we owe very much of the kind of work a National Theatre should do—the old Court Theatre, which gave us nearly all that was best in the drama of the first ten years of this century, and the Lyric, Hammersmith, where Gay and Dryden were made to live again to happy if not permanent purpose. Both these theatres, to which the gratitude of every true lover of the drama who frequented them goes forth, have afforded—each in its own way—proof of a London public ready to respond. I strongly believe that, with something like "national" backing, a body of well-purposed and energetic pioneers could set upon that site in South Kensington an ideal critics' playhouse. It would unite all the scattered forces of the "uncommercial" drama, and serve as an invaluable repository of classics and stimulus to new endeavour.

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## CHAPTER XIII

### THE FUTURE OF CRITICISM

NOW that we have been through the drama of most of the ages from the critic's point of view, it may be useful to end with some suggestions for the future. For the time being I will confine myself to the daily paper. Criticism has changed there more than elsewhere. As we have seen, it now fills only a quarter of the space given it in my first days, and it has to be done much earlier. When I started forty years ago as dramatic critic of the *Morning Leader*, edited by Gordon Hewart, the future Lord Chief Justice—and what an understanding and blithe young editor he was!—one could go on writing till half-past one in the morning.

There was time to have some supper and collect one's thoughts before beginning—that is to say, if the performance ended at eleven. It was by no means rare then for a spectacular show to go on till half-past twelve or one o'clock. Also the more one could write, the better everybody was pleased. To be able to spin it out was the great thing. The world of news was nothing like as big as it is to-day. There was any amount of space that needed filling, and dramatic criticism was good, cheap copy. So the more, the merrier.

#### **Negation of Criticism**

All this is, of course, completely altered now. In some cases, as I have already mentioned, a short paragraph, telephoned after the first act and corrected for a later edition afterwards, if the prophecy has proved entirely wrong, passes for a considered judgment upon the play. In the matter of difficulty I do not think there is much to choose between the two. If it is well done, and proves a true and fair impression of the play—as sometimes does happen—the telephoned paragraph is a good piece of journalistic

anticipation. For a certain number of plays, which can be seen to be of no use at all almost from the rise of the curtain, it is satisfactory enough to the public. They will be spared the disappointment of going to the theatre. But when the play is a really good one, or when it has good work which deserves appreciation and encouragement even in failure, or when a piece of fine acting emerges—then this kind of criticism is of little use. It is, at heart, just a negation of criticism, which entails the perception of good just as much as bad. It is a verdict without evidence, which is absurd.

### Aspects of Criticism

In view of these and other matters I have been interested in recalling some observations of my own made thirty-five years ago in *Journalism as a Profession*, edited by Arthur Lawrence—

The first thing that the public want to know from a daily paper is whether a new play is worth going to or not. If it is, they want to know why it is worth going to. They want to get an idea of what sort of thing it is. They want to know of acting reputations lost or won. They also want "the story"—and that is where the really difficult part of daily-paper dramatic criticism comes in. It may be considered that this is a very humble view of dramatic criticism, offering the critic no distinction from a reporter of current events—of funerals and festivals, Parliamentary speeches and accidents on the Embankment. This is far from being the case. The incidents of a play are not events. They never happened. A mere report of them—which, if they had really happened, would be of enthralling interest—is the dullest of all dull reading.

### Telling "The Story"

What is it, then, that has happened in a theatre? A certain number of people have gathered together, and, by the various means that compose the art of the dramatist, the actor, the scene-painter, and the musician, have been moved to the emotions of joy, hope, sorrow, or mirth, and possibly have received at the same time some intellectual enlightenment. The

dramatic critic has not only to state such occurrences, which is very easily done and takes a line or two. He must also show how it was done, for the public has a great faculty of disbelief. He must find out the various contributing elements to this triumph (or, perhaps, failure) of illusion.

Of these the principal is probably—though by no means necessarily—"the story." But the real story of a play would occupy some three or four columns of a newspaper. The dramatic critic has to choose just such incidents as go to prove his case for or against the play, make them intelligible by coherence, lucid by explanation, and interesting by atmosphere. He must, in effect, tell, not the story of the play, but a parallel story of his own, true to the story of the play, but enormously concentrated and simplified in incident, and also very much altered in emphasis—for it is generally just those matters which seem most important and exciting on the stage which are least suggestive on paper.

He has by this story of his to convey in a few lines the emotions which it has taken the people behind the footlights three hours to produce. Having done this he has to bring in, just in their right proportion, word-pictures of such acting and scenery as have contributed to the effect—pictures that must be more varied than need be any recountal of fact. All this he has to do in the space of an hour or an hour and a half, with the exercise, if it is well done, of both analytical and imaginative qualities of the highest order. . . . So far from being the useless and surfeited monopolizer of a newspaper-office's complimentary pleasures, he is engaged in one of the most difficult and necessary tasks that the varied labours of daily journalism can afford.

## A Vanished Art

Needless as much of this would seem to be now, my memory tells me that the "hour or hour and a half" were employed in conscientious effort to fulfil a task which the present-day daily-paper critic simply does not worry about. The "story," which we of that time used to take such pains over, was an elaborate and much-prized little vignette, trying definitely to create a kind of illusion in the reader that



he, like the critic, had seen the play. Sometimes one would go through the whole "fable". When it was a pretty, well-rounded story, this served best. Sometimes, especially in highly dramatic pieces, one seized upon a particular scene, and contented oneself with what led up to it. But always the telling of "the story" in the criticism was intended as a work of art. It was valuable to the theatre because it attracted the public—sometimes to an indifferent play, but Theseus would have found pardon for that. It was pleasant reading to those who, for some reason or other, would not be likely to see the play at all.

I doubt if there is any kind of criticism now in which this old art of telling "the story" is practised. There simply is not room for it in the present daily-paper notices. Even the evening papers have to forfeit space for a photograph of the principal player or scene, which means an instant death of illusion on the reader's part. The weekly critic has either to write round pictures or devote himself to some excursion in critical theory, on the assumption that his readers have either heard all about the play already or do not want to know. Some of them, like my friend Mr. Agate, will on occasion openly deal with anything else but the play, with the help of a bookshelf and some random allusions.

### **The First Essential**

On the other hand the first practical essential of daily-paper dramatic criticism thirty-five years ago remains even more surely the first practical essential of daily-paper dramatic criticism to-day. It is to decide whether or not a play is worth going to. Although, in the conditions prevailing, present-day criticism is often extremely well done, it is a curious fact that this "A" of the critical alphabet is not always paid sufficient attention to. When there is an obvious, exciting, and brilliant success, the occurrence can hardly help being apparent. Even then the temptation to be "different"—more insistent with the later weeklies—sometimes leads the critic to "hint at a fault and hesitate dislike"

on his own account. But when the play is not an unmistakable and outstanding "winner"—and I have seen many plays run for years that were half-heartedly received or even "booded" on their first night—it is remarkable how few critics can convey to their readers exactly what those readers want to know.

### Self-centred Critics

I have before me, as it happens, some current play-notices in daily papers about a play I do not happen to have seen. Not one of them gives me a clear notion whether, as a reader, I should find it worth my while to pay for a seat. One critic says that it "may be a good play," but that it deals with a subject of which he is personally ignorant. Another recalls his emotions on seeing a real accident something like one in the play. Another confides to us that he first saw the leading lady when he was a boy at school. At the same time they all combine in confessing that it was well acted, well written, and favourably received. What is one to think? None of them attempts—or, indeed, could attempt in the space accorded—to "tell the story," with the help of which I might come to my own conclusion.

One is reminded of the tale told of John Oxenford, the celebrated former critic of *The Times*. He is said to have attended a new production at the now-vanished Olympic Theatre with a lady friend, and was accorded a box, in which he went to sleep. Waking up with a start at the conclusion, he asked his companion to tell him all she could about it and her opinion of its merits, with a view to his notice in next morning's paper. "Well," she is recorded to have answered, "I should call it one of those what-d'you-take-me-for sort of plays." Nowadays, readers of daily newspapers are all too often led to believe that there is a plethora of plays of this description being presented.

Much of this self-centred attitude on the part of some present-day daily-paper critics is, of course, understandable and pardonable. Each one naturally feels the need of

"keeping his end up" as a "personality." It is a healthy ambition, though hardly helped by scraps of autobiography and self-analysis, unless these have something either remarkable or sympathetic about them.

### Individual Expression

A free individual expression of opinion on the critic's part is all-important—a very different thing from indecisive self-assertion. The rule for playwrights laid down by Mr. Somerset Maugham—"Have something to say, and stick to the point"—might almost, if one believed in rules, be transferred to critics. But it all depends upon what the "something" is, and whether the "point" is in any way relevant to the play under consideration.

The cult of "personality" at the expense of other critical duties is, of course, not a new thing, nor is it confined to this side of the Atlantic. Though a believer that "criticism must be personal or nothing," Mr. George Jean Nathan writes in his book, *Criticism and the Drama*—

The trouble with dramatic criticism in America, speaking generally, is that where it is not frankly reportorial it too often seeks to exhibit a personality when there exists no personality to exhibit. Himself, perhaps, conscious of this lack, the critic indulges in heroic makeshifts to inject into his writings a note of individuality, and the only individuality that comes out of his perspirations is of a piece with the bearded lady or the dog-faced boy. The college professor who, having nothing to say, tries to give his criticism an august air by figuratively attaching to it a pair of whiskers and horn-glasses; the suburban college-professor who sedulously practises an aloofness from the madding crowd that his soul longs to be part of; the college-professor who postures as a man of the world; the newspaper reporter who postures as a college-professor; the journalist who performs in terms of Art between the Saks and Gimbel advertisements—these and others like them are the sad comedians in the tragical crew.

In their heavy attempts to live up to their fancy-dress costumes, in their laborious efforts to conceal their humdrum

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personalities in the uncomfortable gauds of Petruchio and Gobbo, they betray themselves even to the 'bus boys. The same performer cannot occupy the rôles of Polonius and Hamlet even in a tank town troupe.

### **“Personalities”**

This is needlessly cruel, but it does emphasize what is an undoubtedly growing tendency—and one which is not only the critic's fault. The fact that all sorts of honest, workaday fellows are tempted to try to assert “personalities” regardless of the play about which they are supposed to be writing is due in some measure, as I have said, to smaller space and larger competition. It is also partly brought about by a public less and less trained to exercise thought and imagination on its own account, and responding to personal assertion because this is more easily understood than ideas with a less simple contour.

The old controversy, too, of impressionism as against information comes in. Mr. G. J. Nathan, as we have seen, throws passing scorn upon what he calls “frankly reportorial” or informative criticism. Was it a very wise taunt? There is no question that many young critics of the present time are so anxious not to be classed as “reporters” that they purposely avoid making any statement of impersonal fact at all—a very stupid and snobbish attitude.

### **Impressionism**

Upon this I find little reason to revise an opinion I set down recently in some articles on “Aspects of Criticism” contributed to *Theatre and Stage*, Mr. Harold Downs's invaluable compendium of present-day theatrical knowledge, to which I am indebted for several other remarks included in the present chapter—

To those who have practised criticism for any length of time there is a very plain answer to the long-vexed question as to whether it should be impressionistic or informative. It must

be both. I have no patience with some current criticism which purports to be so exclusively impressionistic that it conveys no idea of what the play is about, whether or not it is worth seeing, of what kind the production is, or who appeared in it and in what characters. This is not criticism. It is just tomfoolery. It thrives only in circumstances definitely hostile to the theatre. . . .

At the same time, the older I grow, the more I find it advisable and possible to rely on my own subconscious impressions. I have found these to be always right, as against any argued or external representation to the contrary. I do not believe in thinking out my notice during the play—as so many do. I believe in being an absolutely natural playgoer up to the fall of the curtain; then, an absolutely unnatural journalist. With impressions collected, good journalism demands that one should be just as informative as time and space permit.

### Critic-Dramatists

A charge once made to me by the late James Welch concerning the critic-dramatists of an earlier generation would be, as we have already seen, to some extent true of the critics of the present time. It was at the first performance of his afterwards successful farce, *When Knights Were Bold*. I happened to be seeing him about some other business in his dressing-room. The play was not going too well. He put this down to the apathetic demeanour of the critics present. "I know those — critics," he said, shaking his fist in the direction of the auditorium: "disappointed dramatists, every man jack of them!"

Quite seriously this has to do with a personal problem to be earnestly considered by any writer entering upon a career in the theatre. Is criticism a good apprenticeship to playwriting? Is it worth while for a young man who wants to become a playwright to try to get into criticism with a view to getting out of it? My own experience is that when a successful dramatist has been also a successful critic things have nearly always happened the other way round. Shaw, Ervine, and Ashley Dukes were all dramatists before they

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were critics. Archer's ultimate success with *The Green Goddess* was largely due to the fact that he had been writing plays all his life. He had, indeed, tried his hand at them long before he decided to make criticism his major business. Walkley used to aver, with a twinkle of the eye, that he had "never written a play"; but he did not say that he had never tried.

### **The Richer Prize**

So, too, with the practising critics of to-day. At the next Christmas revival of Harriet Jay's play the shade of James Welch might still shake a ghostly fist from the other side of the curtain. The critics would probably be playing truant in an always busy week; but it would still be true that nearly every one of them has at some time or other toyed with the idea of becoming a dramatist himself. After all, it is only reasonable that this should be so. A successful play brings its author a fortune; criticism supplies at best an insignificant income compared with that of the social paragraphist who shares the first-night seats. A young man who loved the stage and did not try first for the richer prize would probably not be much good as a critic or as anything else. There is no disgrace in having tried and failed. The disgrace would be in not having tried. How many brilliant and even great men have made the trial and not succeeded in being successful dramatists? When Mark Twain was urged to write a play his answer was: "Sir, I have written fifty." Dr. Johnson's effort with *Irene* did not prevent him from contending that, as a dramatic critic, he "knew more about mutton than any sheep."

For those who have tried and even partially succeeded, I myself do not think criticism—that is to say the daily drudgery—is of much use. I have seen some well-equipped creative minds completely staled by it. Shaw tells us that his brief two years as the *Saturday Review* critic "nearly killed" him. St. John Ervine and Ashley Dukes have very wisely given up regular first-night criticism.

On the other hand there is such a thing as a born critic—that is to say, a born journalist with a love of, and instinct for, the theatre, untainted by personal vanity or disappointment, or idle delusions of any kind. For such a man—or woman, for there is no reason why Aphra Behn and Mrs. Inchbald should not have their successors in England as well as America—dramatic criticism, judiciously mixed with other avocations, remains even now worth the industry and sacrifices it entails. It can never on its own account lead to wealth; but it may to happiness and even honour.

### **To Intending Critics**

Perhaps I should end by giving a few suggestions for those who, in spite of all warnings, are still intending critics. We will suppose that a boy is just leaving school and has made up his mind that he wants to be a dramatic critic for a daily paper. How is he to set about it? Shall he go to a University, or become immediately a journalistic apprentice, or enter the Civil Service, or try his luck on the stage or in films, or in a broadcasting studio? Or should he forget all about it and pursue some calling that will take him for a discreet period into the heart of Africa or the back-blocks of Australia—anywhere where there is least likelihood of there being any theatre at all—and then rely upon an entirely fresh outlook? I have mentioned these various possibilities because I have known critics who have arrived by each road. They have succeeded or failed with curiously little regard to their past. Moreover, the number of now-practising critics who came to the theatre direct from the Great War makes any analysis of precedent still more unreliable.

### **Aims and Warnings**

Speaking from a pretty large experience, I can say that I have found it best to advise all young men who contemplate taking up daily dramatic criticism as a profession to ask themselves what their real aim is. Do they really want to be critics; or would they not much rather be actors or

dramatists? Or is not all they want just to have an opportunity for plenty of enjoyable playgoing and to meet the distinguished people who are recorded as going to first-nights? If their wishes, tastes, and talents lie in any of these directions I would urge them to steer clear of criticism. All these ends are better attainable by other means.

### **On the Stage**

The stage itself, for instance, needs no roundabout approach. There is nothing whatever to stop any boy or girl going direct to one of our dramatic schools and learning to become an actor or actress. The old days when he or she had to run away from home or plunge into provincial melodrama—excellent school as it was—are over now. As for the would-be dramatist, I have already tried to show that nearly all the critic-dramatists who have done well in the latter capacity were dramatists first and critics afterwards. Even so, a spell on the stage itself, either as actor or producer, or any sort of activity in the social world, is a better preparation for dramaturgy than criticism. The experience to be got in helping to stage a round of classics with a struggling repertory company is likely to be more useful—to a budding dramatist—than anything he will learn in a newspaper office. Newspaper-work will tend to make him—as it should—a critic instead. The most important thing for him, either way, is that there should be as many outlying adventures at home and abroad as he has pluck to enter upon.

Then there is the young man or young woman who just likes the theatre and thinks it would be jolly to go to exciting first nights free of charge. Here again every reason exists to dissuade any such young people from going into training for the profession of criticism. When it comes to going every night year after year to the same recurring theatres, meeting the same sort of people at the same sort of plays, and seeing the same players acting in one very much as they did in another, the glamour soon disappears unless there is a much deeper love of the theatre than attendance at first nights answers



for. To aspirants of this type my advice is that they should go into some much more lucrative profession. The more money they make, the more plays they will be able to go to, and the more they will enjoy them by spending their time in something quite different during the day.

### **Newspaper Work**

I can now come to that curiously rare bird—the “born critic” I have mentioned—the man, woman, boy, or girl, whose talent is for journalism and who has at the same time a profound love of the theatre. My own feeling is that for the young would-be critic of this description the best training is to take the playgoing for granted and begin with general newspaper work. The all-round journalist who is, and is known to be, keen about the theatre will get his opportunity long before the exclusively theatrical student. He will also be more likely to make good with it than the man who has still to acquire a sense of proportional values and other instinctive promptings which come naturally to the trained mind and hand.

The difference between the competent daily-paper critic and the amateur is not, after all, that he goes to theatres and sees plays. Everybody does that. It is that he is able to turn out on the spot—or at a newspaper-office immediately afterwards—a clear, bright, accurate assessment, which has an interest and character and entertainment value of its own and is something that every one will want to read. It is the power of being at once lively and judicious and of being so at break-neck speed, with every sentence and paragraph formulated, as it comes, to an exact number of words.

This rapid blending of character and truth, the seizing of salient points, and the exercise of imagination capable of conveying ideas into immediate print, cannot be managed without experience. I myself went through the provincial “mill,” and owe an incalculable deal to it. I had done practically everything on the editorial side of newspapers both in town and country—from junior reporter to editor—

before I was given, at twenty-two years of age, my first appointment as dramatic critic for a London daily. It was on the strength of a notice of the first performance of Forbes Robertson's *Hamlet* at the Lyceum, written from the third row standing behind the gallery.

### University Training

Granted wide reading and ardent playgoing—without which there would be no hope for him at all—I do not think the intending critic who takes the trouble to be a journalist need fear missing a few seasons of specialized theatrical knowledge. This will come soon enough. I can assure him that after twenty or thirty years he will find that he knows, if anything, too much. To keep young of heart and in sympathy with the supposed new movements which are always cropping up he will have to be constantly deciding what it is best to pretend to have forgotten.

I am often asked whether a university training is a good thing for an intending critic. Of course it is. It is so particularly just now, when not only Oxford and Cambridge, but London University and others, are paying a remarkable amount of attention to the theatre, both officially and otherwise. The London University diploma has an especial value. But I do not believe in specializing too early. The groundwork—classical and modern—must be broad and thorough. All the lectures on dramatic theory—inspiring though they may sometimes be—will not replace sound scholarship and the mastery of at least three languages.

Meanwhile to be in the swim of the theatre “groups” is a great thing. The Oxford University Dramatic Society, the Cambridge A.D.C., and kindred amateur clubs at other universities have borne notable fruit among critics as well as among actors and dramatists. They will, I think, do so still more. It is to be remembered, however, that journalism has to be learned afterwards just the same, with or without a degree. This is the shock in store. The undergraduate essay, with its parade of borrowed views, its assumption of

unpossessed knowledge, its fear of expressing sincere and simple-hearted enthusiasm and other characteristics referred to by Longinus as "puerile," is generally an exact example of how dramatic criticism should not be written.

### **Specialization**

We will assume now that our young friend has been to a university, has had some drilling in journalism, and has gone about the world just as much as his pocket and temperament have made possible. If he is known as a playgoer it will not be long before he is given his trial as a "second string" critic. Presuming that he is successful, he will have to decide how far to specialize and how far not. This is an extremely important point. It is one already settled for Civil Servants, barristers, and others with unjournalistic day-time work—though they have troubles of their own. A barrister's legal duties may be graded down to none at all, if he wishes; but the Civil Service is more exacting than it was, and dramatic criticism in London, with first performances almost every night instead of two or three times a week, is growing a little too arduous to be looked upon as a mere hobby.

Anyhow, the young journalist who is beginning his career will soon have to choose what else he is going to do. Probably he will already have sacrificed, for dramatic criticism, much more profitable and promising chances in political work, foreign correspondence, and other of the countless paths that may lead to great things in and from the "street of adventure." He has chosen a branch of journalism that will soon cease to be an adventure at all, and will certainly be less so when he is sixty than when he is twenty-six years of age. Granted a full understanding and acceptance of this state of affairs, what is the best kind of other work to be doing? I must again set it down as a fact which cannot be too strongly emphasized for the young journalist that almost without exception dramatic criticism, even on the leading national newspapers, has to be reinforced by other employment, journalistic or no. Even the few apparent exceptions

are mostly critics who also deal with theatrical "news," or "cover" films as well, or write criticisms for a number of papers.

### Side-Lines

I myself have tried all these alternatives—each of them for many years—and none is satisfactory. Theatrical news-gathering has its value for a young critic. I myself owe some priceless friendships to it, and it gives a knowledge of what may be called stage politics that the isolated student sometimes misses. To any critic, however, who has arrived at a position in which his opinion counts, the difficulty of being a judge by night and a news-hunter by day and night is a constant hindrance in both directions.

This side of newspaper work has also been very much complicated—or perhaps I should say simplified—since the beginning of my critical career by the arrival of the "Press agent." He (or she) was introduced from America shortly before the turn of the century, and has become an extremely important factor in theatre-life. The pioneer on our side of the Atlantic was the late Louis Nethersole. He had been taking his sister, Olga, round America, and set himself up as London's first professional liaison officer between Press and management. His example was soon followed, till the practice of each theatre or production having a special purveyor of paragraphs and photographs and news-ideas became general. The Press agent not only sends out "news," but acts as host at Press receptions, and sees to the personal "publicity" of 'stars'—and others. I have known of cases in which nearly every member of a company has had a different Press agent to supplement the attentions of the staff official employed by the management.

### Press Agents

There was nothing of this when I started. Many editors objected to putting in announcements of coming productions anywhere else but "under the clock" and at

customary rates. Those papers that did indulge in a column of theatrical talk were accommodated in this respect by the critic himself, who went and saw the actual managers. I had a regular day each week for visiting Tree, Alexander, and George Edwardes, and saw others as occasion served. These conversations were by no means confined to "news." They were more or less friendly conferences in which one learned an enormous deal of "the other side"—especially as the barrier between the stage and the outer world was much more marked then than it is now. Possibly the manager himself was sometimes given a fresh point of view. But always, sooner or later, the time came when one's duty as a critic had to be candidly done, and a cold spell set in.

On the whole, I think the Press agent has been a benefit—indeed, he has become necessary with the present enlargement of the personal and photographic element in news. Being concerned with journalists all his time, he understands their difficulties a good deal better than the old-time manager used to, and has taken over work a critic could never do. I might add that Press agency is a calling that may well be thought of by an ambitious young man or woman, as it very often leads to management. But it is not, and is never likely to be, a stepping-stone to criticism. The Press agent is a paid servant of the theatre, which puts him outside the critical pale for ever. Happily—in this country at any rate—criticism is astonishingly honest. Managers may give lunches and cocktail parties, but the only way to "buy" a critic is to buy the paper—and even that does not always succeed. One effect of the coming of the Press agent has been to make the collection of any other theatrical news than that officially given out a still more undesirable side-line for a critic.

### **Film Criticism**

In the same way, the criticism of films does not fit in well with that of plays. I did both for twelve years and am astonished at having survived. It is not only that the

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combination means working treble tides—a film in the morning, a film in the afternoon, a play in the evening, writing and fussing in between, and six hours' sleep. Alike the technique and the standards of taste are so different that one tends to become cynical and disinterested. It is idle, too, to pretend that there are not, and will not always be, points of antagonism between the two as business interests. This makes it inevitable that a critic who is human should be prejudiced—consciously or not—according to the policy of the paper he represents. If he is not so, or prejudiced in a contrary direction, his position is even more uncomfortable.

Novel-writing, as I have already noted, is favoured in some quarters. But the writer of a "best-seller," like the winner of a Derby sweep, must be treated as an exception. The writing of unsuccessful or moderately-successful hack-novels—or, indeed, novels of any sort—seems generally to be much better done where there is freedom to move about the world and get local colour, than with the need for returning every night in thought and fact to the footlights and Fleet Street. This must almost inevitably mean a novel about the theatre after a year or two and then the end either of good novel-writing or of good daily criticism.

### **Book-Reviewing**

From a journalistic point of view, I have found book-reviewing a better side-line than most; but even there I would avoid the reviewing of novels—and they represent the staple of so-called "literary" criticism. If they are conscientiously read in any number—I have found a weekly half-dozen more than enough—they tend to stale dramatic perception. One gets weary of plots and of fiction in any form, which is unfair to the play one is going to see in the evening.

As for the writing of dramatic criticism for more than two or at most three newspapers, I have found this the worst form of critical drudgery. At one time I used to have to write five notices of every play. By the time it came to the

last—especially as half a dozen or so other plays would have been produced in between—I usually wished the whole thing at kingdom-come. This is, I fear, a state of mind very prevalent in one form or another in present-day criticism. It is, perhaps, partly responsible for the habit of veering off the play under supposed consideration for aftermath notices. Certainly it is an attitude not likely to be helpful to dramatists, to actors, to managers, or to the public.

### Salaries

I have set these points down here because they are important to the young man or woman who is seriously bent upon becoming a regular, daily dramatic critic. The reason is that, although it can easily be made a whole-time job, dramatic criticism is not—and probably never will be—a whole-pay job for any one who has not made a big name elsewhere. The number of staff critics in London who are making more than £500 a year out of dramatic criticism alone for a single daily or evening paper could be counted on one's fingers. On weeklies I have known clever, highly-cultured men who have forfeited fine opportunities in other fields, and have struggled to keep up a dress-suit existence on £3 a week or less. Some have ended their lives in dire poverty, though still in harness. A very large number of periodicals have given up looking upon dramatic criticism as a professional affair at all—always, it may be said, with disastrous results to the product. A famous London weekly review was recently offering 10s. a page!

### Education

In these circumstances I would suggest to the potential dramatic critic that he should arrange his other work from the first and regard the representing of a national paper at anything like an adequate professional salary as, at best, an off-chance. In my own case the temptation happened, as I have described, very early and very easily. When I was appointed dramatic critic of the now-vanished *Morning*

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*Leader* on the strength of my gallery-impression of Forbes Robertson's *Hamlet* the salary was £3 a week. It remained so for seven years. I looked upon the experience as an education, and cheerfully saw my young colleagues going up to far more lucrative positions and distinguishing themselves both in Fleet Street and by transfer to other professions. An education it certainly was. It gave me the personal friendship of Shaw, Archer, Walkley, Grein, and others of the men who were making the dramatic criticism of the day memorable and inspiring. It gave me the chance of seeing all the plays of the later 'nineties—of seeing the rise of Shaw as a dramatist, and of Barrie, and all the best work of Pinero, Jones, Carton, Esmond, Marshall, and St. John Hankin, and of Maugham from his first play onwards. It gave a whole decade of Irving, with Hare, Wyndham, Hawtrey, the Kendals, Forbes Robertson, Tree, Alexander, and other now departed actor-managers, all in their glory. It gave me the annual seasons of Coquelin, Bernhardt, Réjane, Duse, and Ada Rehan—not forgetting occasional visits of the *Comédie Française* company, with Silvain and Féraudy and a host of other enlightenments.

Admirable education as all this could not help being, I soon found what all critics must find—that without further purpose the end is just continued education. The time comes when a new generation of young men are glad to be educated at a small salary—I have seen several such waves—and no editor pays more than he has got to. So there is always a tendency for dramatic criticism as a profession to be standardized in general at the lowest figure a young man will take to be educated.

### Epigrams

In a way there is little to regret in this. So long as their elders find an adequate market for their experience, no better training could be imagined for young critics than daily work with the responsibility of a large circulation to keep them from going off into wild fallacies. At the same



time some little hints born of long service may be useful. There are certain twists of mind incident to youth—I myself was terribly guilty—which need to be constantly kept in check. One of the chief of these is the temptation to sneer, and to court cheap notoriety by those spiteful epigrams which are so easily concocted. They help nobody. They do not instruct old playgoers or make new ones. In the end they are certain to bring their revenges upon the critic himself.

At the same time, absolute candour, sincerity, and independence are essential. I have always remembered the dictum of one of my earliest and most respected editors. "Say just what you like, my boy," he used to tell me, "so long as you sincerely think it and have reason for the faith that is in you. I don't mind who it is you go for. All I ask is that you should be glad if the play is a good one and sorry if it is not." How natural and reasonable a point of view it seems! Yet I have again and again known young critics—and not only young ones—hailing some ghastly failure with delight as giving them scope for throwing paper-pellets with impunity. This sort of thing only gets dramatic criticism into disrepute, without betraying an attractive personality in the critic.

### **Constructive Criticism**

Let satire say what it will, dramatic criticism more than any other—on account of its intensely practical effect—should be constructive rather than destructive. If destruction is deserved, criticism can be convincing only when it is known that the critic is a true lover of the theatre and not given to unnecessary attack. By constructive criticism I mean that which encourages good and struggling work, builds up reputations by persistent interest, interprets ideas that might be misunderstood, creates in the reader a wish for what is best in the theatre, and offers, without impertinent intrusion, an occasional suggestion of new possibilities.

Young critics may, none the less, be warned against a

kind of "constructive" criticism which is boring to everybody and of no use to the theatre. This is the harping upon niggling and purely technical matters—little points of setting, construction, or stage management—which would often be far better dealt with in a letter to, or talk with, the producer, playwright, or actor. It is the besetting sin of many young academic critics, desirous of revealing a nascent understanding of playcraft. I myself have found it well to keep always in mind that in a national newspaper one is writing not for the theatrical manager but for a public spread over the entire kingdom, most of whom will not even see the play and are only confused by contentions over trifles.

### **Provincial Papers**

It may be well to turn now to some different phases of present-day criticism. Whatever happens in the columns of modern national newspapers, congested with a thousand more clamant interests, dramatic criticism is growing more active than ever in other quarters. The provincial papers still offer a ready field for the competent journalist who is not dependent upon the theatre alone for his livelihood. Manchester, Liverpool, and Birmingham have each a great critical tradition and sustain it. Most of the larger provincial papers give longer notices to visiting productions than that with which the London original was—or will be—favoured. Even the paragraph in a provincial "London Letter" often affords a better idea of a West End play than is to be found from what should be more authoritative sources. The writers of these are no less dramatic critics because they have other affairs to concern them. In all sorts of out-of-the-way places I have found criticism fostering the revival of the living drama, where until recently every vestige of it had been swept away.

The amateur movement is offering a new and almost unlimited task to dramatic critics. The work of competition-judges and lecturers frequently reveals a breadth of view, an eagerness, and a sense of delight in pioneer creation which puts to shame those half-hearted professional references to

trashy farce or doubtful comedy that one knows so well. The word *amateur* must connote nowadays all that is done for joy in the work itself and not for exploitation. I should include many enterprises that do not come strictly under the amateur label. I should include, for instance, part-time repertory companies, like that of the Maddermarket at Norwich, and the Bath Citizen House Players. These semi-amateur repertory companies have been, and still are, immensely important seeding-grounds for the new professional theatre now springing to life again after the temporary deluge of cinema-and-radio competition.

### Amateur Stage

In pre-War days the amateur stage was, as many of us remember only too well, almost wholly imitative and therefore seldom worth critical notice. We had a galaxy of accepted dramatists on the professional stage—very occasionally added to by some managerial “discovery.” Their plays were regularly presented at appropriate West End theatres, then went on tour, were finally released for amateur performance, and were duly presented by a cluster of well-known amateur clubs. This routine phase of amateur play-production is by no means dead. Many of the old clubs—such as the Old Stagers and the Windsor Strollers—still honourably survive. The ever-growing number of amateur “dramatic and operatic societies” belonging to banks and business-houses still rush for every successful musical play and popular comedy as it becomes available. They still keep up the vogue of Gilbert-and-Sullivan, and afford a stable income to the author of any moderately bright play which has a long cast of fairly equal and easy character parts.

The outlook is altogether different in regard to the creative amateur. He has been responsible, one way and another, for nearly everything that is worth while on our present stage. From Stanislavski and the Moscow Art Theatre, Antoine's Théâtre Libre, the New York Theatre Guild, and our own

Independent Theatre and Stage Society—amateur in spirit for all their professional casts—to the host of organizations now gathered under the British Drama League's banner, what our stage and the stage of the world owe to work that has been done without thought of profit is incalculable.

### **Poel and Craig**

It is in the encouragement of amateur production of this order that criticism has had—and still has—a great duty to perform. The late William Poel, for instance, and the productions of his Elizabethan Stage Society, happened to coincide with my early days as a dramatic critic. From the standpoint of popular interest—a standpoint which some modern newspapers regard with a kind of statistical reverence, apportioning their attention in exact ratio to the numbers present—they were of no value whatever. Here were a few hundred rather crankish people gathered in a city hall, seeing something utterly at variance with every canon of current attractiveness. The performances were given in a dim light and to the accompaniment of obsolete musical instruments. If there had been no critics impelled to let the world know that at the back of it all was something which was right where everything else was wrong, nothing more would have happened.

Fortunately a few critics were so impressed that they defied their own professional interests by writing quite a deal about Mr. Poel. The result was that though he himself benefited not at all—not being of an exploitative turn of mind—his ideas gradually spread. He proved, in a phrase actually used by Mr. Granville Barker, “good to steal from.” So also with Gordon Craig—whom I would include in my encomiums were it not that I know he would resent furiously being referred to as having anything to do with “amateurs.” Among others, Reinhardt was inspired by both Craig and Poel to make profitable havoc of accepted conventions in theatres little and big.

## Apostolate of Critics

Thus it came about that although only a comparative handful of enthusiasts saw those early productions of Poel and Craig—Poel's were presented at an average cost of £150 each, much of which came out of his own pocket—no Shakespearian or classic production of any kind would be tolerated nowadays which did not owe some quality to them. The Poel production of *Everyman*, to which I have already referred, established a modern "miracle play" tradition, which made Cochran's great show at Olympia possible and has had recent fruit in such exquisite things as Charles Claye's *Joyous Pageant of the Holy Nativity* (another wholly amateur production), played to crowded audiences in every kind of building, from cathedral to music hall.

I need not go through the long list of all the amateur enterprises that have owed their wider influence upon the theatre in general to intelligent and sympathetic criticism. Practically every new vista that has opened, and is opening, has been due to this *entente* between the creative amateur and such critics as are not content with the mere recording of self-evident success. It was so from the early days of the Independent Theatre to the arrival of Shaw as a "commercial dramatist." It was so from the starting of the little amateur group which fore-ran the Abbey Theatre in Dublin to the presenting of Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* and O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock*. It was so from the founding of the Mermaid Society by a critic, Philip Carr, to its direct outcome in Sir Nigel Playfair's management at the Lyric, Hammersmith, and from that of the Pilgrim Players to Sir Barry Jackson's establishment of the Birmingham Repertory Theatre. In all of these and countless other enterprises, which began with faith and led—some of them—to fortune, the apostolate of critics has been undeniable.

## Localization

It is happening still all over England and America, wherever there is an amateur or semi-amateur theatre doing

the kind of work those pioneers of other days set before them. But it is not happening to the extent one would wish. This is partly because dramatic endeavour—above all amateur endeavour—is getting more and more localized, while newspaper interest is being more and more centralized. Though some provincial papers do, as I have said, pay considerable attention to visiting London “stars,” they tend to be briefer and less impassioned over the achievements of their neighbours. Perhaps this is inevitable—“a prophet is not without honour, save in his own country”—but the more adventurous kind of amateur theatre in a provincial town has thereby a harder struggle than it need have. Again and again on journeying to a provincial town to see a performance of genuine importance from an artistic point of view I have opened the local paper to find very little about the event. But there will be columns of palpable “blurb,” sent round from the London publicity office, about stale American films, which have been done to death elsewhere and have no local bearing whatsoever.

### **The Junior Reporter**

Sometimes I feel that it is not always the newspaper's fault. I have known young theatre managers settle in a town and imagine that the local journalists are going to form a worshipping choir immediately of their own accord. This is, it must be emphasized, not the habit of local or any other journalists. Before these “chartered libertines” show respect they very naturally demand respect. If the editors themselves can be wooed and won to forget the inevitable commercial preponderance of other attractions, well and good. It has been done miraculously in some instances. But the local critic has to be recognized as such. Though he is called a “reporter” and may not always be in evening-dress, to express open disappointment to his face because he does not happen to be a big man with a big name from London is always unwise. Even if he is a young fellow whose knowledge is assumed rather than acquired, it is for the manager

to go down on his knees, and thank Heaven fasting for a good journalist's love. The junior reporter is never to be despised. He may be a proprietor in a year or two. At the worst he also can learn—and like it.

When all else fails, there is no questioning the value of the critical programme—or theatre magazine—though this is apt to dwindle into a “who’s-who” of the cast. The precedent of Lessing is rarely followed, except in some university magazines, where we do get a certain amount of candid analysis of the play and its treatment. I myself am a great believer in amateur critics for amateur actors. But the theatre magazine cannot and never will replace the unhampered criticism of an independent newspaper. This is preferable not only because the critic is then in a position to administer reproof, but because he can dare to be far more outspoken in his praise.

The best arrangement is when a little body of theatre-folk and local critics are all working and dreaming and hoping together, moved by a common bond of love of the theatre and of their native or adopted home. It leads to that pride in common achievement which is one of the chief delights in theatre work of all kinds. This was one of the happy characteristics of the old Horniman days in Manchester. Beneath all the grime of the black-faced old city one felt that it was good “in that dawn to be alive.” In the circumstances, how easy to forgive an apparent forgetfulness sometimes that what Manchester thought to-day England had thought some three-hundred-odd years before!

### **Rival Critics**

Within recent years the extension of film criticism and radio-criticism and ballet criticism into specialized departments has undoubtedly had a narrowing effect upon the outlook of the “old-fashioned” dramatic critic. The music critic, too, is more ready than he used to be to enlarge the salient of grand opera, and to claim all kinds of drama with music as within his province. These are, of course,

comparatively trivial details. If they relieve the dramatic critic of work for which he has not time, and do not interfere too much with the space accorded him for productions where there is no doubt about the predominant element—and there are more than enough of these in London alone to keep one man busy every day of his life—no harm is done. In so far as specialized experts in music, films, and broadcasting deal with drama they are dramatic critics. Any questions between colleagues hardly enter into our present considerations. It is enough that everybody who calls himself a dramatic critic should use his best endeavours to know and understand all forms of dramatic appeal.

### **Social Changes**

In any case it is clear that if the responsibility of dramatic criticism is being contended for it is something of power and importance—probably of growing power and importance. Whoever the critic is, and in whatever direction his specialized knowledge may be, he is still a “guardian of the æsthetic fact.” Nor is he only the guardian. He is also at once the herald and the questioner of that whole mystery of make-believe, in the inner meaning of which forty centuries have made hardly more difference than forty years.

It is possible that social changes may have a certain effect upon the theatre itself—in the exclusive significance of the word. The cinema drove drama out of the theatre for a time in many quarters; but it had curiously little power to change it, and broadcasting none whatever. Television is not likely to do much more than both together, either as an influence or as a rival. These are not human expressions in the same sense as the stage play. They do not need the human response which true criticism conveys and inspires. At the same time I do foresee a partial emergence from what is still to so great an extent the eighteenth-century tradition in the theatre itself. I fancy we may find not so many drawing-room comedies for drawing-room theatres, and more broad treatments of a larger life, with studies of racial



character and the world scene, better informed than those provided by present-day revue and so-called romance.

### **At South Kensington**

What effect the National Theatre at South Kensington will have in this remains to be seen. As one of the few remaining original promoters of the scheme, and a member of the committee for more than a quarter of a century, I need hardly reassert my already expressed belief that it will be of great benefit not only to the theatre at large but to criticism. As yet I do not think it would be wise to expect too much pioneering adventure from the National Theatre. There must still be real life and movement in the theatres elsewhere to make it even possible. The principal value of the National Theatre will be in co-ordinating and extending the splendid work already accomplished and still in progress toward setting a standard in the presentation of Shakespeare and the ever-growing body of British drama that should not be let die. It will also give dignity to the drama as an art—as something of abiding value to the character of the nation.

### **America Calling**

It has been said that all this could be done without setting up a new theatre, and that an organization without a playhouse of its own would be just as useful. In this may be detected at once the old, familiar accent of hostility to the theatre and to any effort of any kind on its behalf. Why *not* set up a new theatre? As it happens, Great Britain is small enough—as Stratford on Avon has shown us—for an actual theatre to be visitable at pretty frequent intervals from all parts of the kingdom. In America the distances are so much greater that one building could hardly bear the same relation to the whole. The record of the Federal Theatre tells us what can be managed under Government auspices by people who have faith in their purpose and its future. Starting as it did by way of an industrial experiment for the employment

of out-of-work actors, it has discovered all over the United States a fresh market for new and old material at popular prices. This is all to the good; but it is a very different thing from establishing a standard of achievement in one central theatre.

Both of these—and many other enterprises on the idealistic “uncommercial” plane—prove clearly enough that the flesh-and-blood theatre is very far from being a dead or even dying interest. The enormous popularity of ballet has not, perhaps, done much as yet to help the spoken drama, but it may do so in the end. After all, it was out of ballet that drama grew ages ago—and human nature has altered astonishingly little in the meantime.

### Mr. Maugham's “Summing Up”

Mr. Somerset Maugham's jeremiad over the prospects of so-called “realistic” drama in his book *The Summing Up* seems to me to mistake the foreground for the horizon. He writes—

I cannot but state my belief that the prose drama to which I have given so much of my life will soon be dead. . . . Perhaps the best chance the realistic dramatist has to-day is to occupy himself with what, till now at all events, the screen has not succeeded very well in presenting—the drama in which the action is inner rather than outer, and the comedy of wit. . . .

To my mind, the drama took a wrong turning when the demand for realism led it to abandon the ornament of verse. Verse has a specific dramatic value, as anyone can see by observing in himself the thrilling effect of a tirade in one of Racine's plays or of any of Shakespeare's great set pieces; and this is independent of the sense; it is due to the emotional power of rhythmical speech.

But more than that . . . verse delivers a play from sober reality. It puts it on another level, at one remove from life, and so makes it easier for the audience to attune themselves to that state of feeling in which they are most susceptible to the drama's specific appeal.

### A Tired View

All this is, of course, as any reader of Mr. Maugham's book will remember, largely due to the fact that Mr. Maugham was at the time confessedly tired of the frictional and often disheartening work which even the most successful dramatist has to face in order to get his ideas presented on the stage. He was, he tells us, tired even of the public whom he saw queuing up to see his own plays. His right and wise suggestion as regards a return to verse has already been partly fulfilled in the success of *Murder in the Cathedral* and other verse dramas. I doubt very much the need for announcing final obsequies even of the "realistic prose play." Just at the moment the English-speaking public may not be in a mood for the particular type of closely psychological and rather cynical comedy which Mr. Maugham supplied in his mature years. But this need not prevent or discount the arrival of new dramatists of genius in that kind, full of energy and of apparently fresh ideas.

The true history of the drama goes forward in cycles represented not by decades but by æons. It took, as we have seen, two thousand years to prepare for the Elizabethan outburst. The Greek dramatists were the fruit of a period longer still. On the surface is perpetual change in accordance with the externals of civilization. The essentials alter almost imperceptibly with centuries. In modern-dress performances of Shakespeare, on both sides of the Atlantic, we find that the only consequent troubles which really count are a few archaic words, the absence of telephones and cars—easily brought in—and the carrying of swords. Otherwise, how little three hundred years matter !

### Expressionism

Nearly all supposed new movements are just the picking up of temporarily forgotten traditions—never exactly as they were, but with that slight difference which marks humanity's general struggle to larger knowledge and more widespread comfort. Living drama is particularly liable to seem

reactionary—bound as it is by the physical presence of actor and audience. The “expressionistic” stage, for instance, has been much in vogue lately, with its neglect of detailed imitation and of imposed moral purpose. It goes back, through Nietzsche, to the old Dionysian rites and revels. Yet it affords what appears to be a new freedom. It gives a means by which “news” and discussion can be brought—as they were in the age of Aeschylus and Euripides—within the domain of dramatic art. How much of Shaw’s time would have been saved if he had not had, in his early days, to box up his ideas within the “four walls” of “realistic” comedy!

So long as we live and move physically and meet one another’s real-life selves, I believe flesh-and-blood drama will survive. It and the criticism that goes with it will at their best be a perpetual reminder of ideal beauty on the one hand and of how far—but never entirely—humanity falls short of that ideal. It will help us to explore the unknown world of fancy and the known world of all times and places. It will give us tears for the sorrows of others and, in them, forgetfulness of our own. It will bring to us the divine gift of laughter without malice and without abasement. It will blend all these together in a simulacrum—whether “realistic” or not—of the eternal movement and contrast which make so large a part of life’s magic.

### **“Seven Lamps”**

One might summarize these elements of what is good in the theatre as “seven lamps,” the tending of which is part of the task of dramatic criticism. They would be faith, truth, imagination, knowledge, sympathy, humour, variety. The greatest of these is faith. We have always to remember that the theatre, whether grave or gay, is still in many respects—as it was once entirely—a place of worship. What is called “illusion” is an act of prayer. We seek out what we really want—be it coarse fun or tragic pathos or moral challenge—and we ask to be helped to imagine it true for us.



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